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# The Activities of a Jewish Merchant House in Bengal (1786-1798). A Contribution to the Economic History of London Jews in India

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# THE ACTIVITIES OF A JEWISH MERCHANT HOUSE IN BENGAL (1786-1798)

## A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF LONDON JEWS IN INDIA

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## INTRODUCTION

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE JEWISH ASSOCIATION WITH BENGAL[1]

### I

From the middle of the seventeenth century on the English East India Company began along with the other European trading companies — Portuguese, Dutch, French and Danish — to establish trading posts in various parts of Bengal. The first permanent foothold of the English merchants was in Hugli on the Ganges, in 1651, 24 miles north of Calcutta, where they could open their first factory after having been granted full rights of trade, free of all customs and duties, by the Moghul ruler, Prince Shuja, against the annual payment of the small sum of 3000 rupees. Soon after, other factories — trading posts — of the English merchants were established in Dacca, Balasore, Kazimbazar, Patna, and other places.

These trading posts, first subordinated to the President and Council in Surat, and at a later stage, temporarily under the administration of Madras, were finally placed under the authority of a Governor and Council of Bengal in 1682.

The first Governor of Bengal, William Hedges (1682) was succeeded by J. Charnock, the real founder of Calcutta in 1690, under whom the settlements of the English East Indian Company in Bengal were reorganized, and consolidated. Fort William became the scene of a presidency independent of Madras and it was this youngest of the three presidencies which gave rise to the foundation of the British Empire in India[2].

Whether Jewish merchants were associated with the English factories in Bengal in their early development is doubtful. We can dismiss the view of Abraham Farissol[3]

1. The following study has been carried out in India as well as in London with the help of a Guggenheim Fellowship (1959-1960) and a Fulbright Research Fellowship (1963-1964).

2. For the general background, see *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. 5, British India (1437-1858), ed. H. H. Dodwell, and the Bibliography, there on pp. 623-627.

3. Abraham Farissol's *Itinera Mundi (Description of the Ways of the World)*, ed. Thomas Hyde, Oxford, 1691, pp. 148, 168. N. Slousch in *Revue du Monde Musulman*, Paris, 1908, Vol. 4, p. 729, has accepted this erroneous identification.

(1524) who equated Gozan as mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (*Qiddushin* 72) with Ganges and maintained the existence of Jewish settlements there. There is one general allusion to Jews in Bengal by François Pyrard[1] (1601-1611) who states, « Under the government of this King [Bengal], are men of many religions, Jews, Mohammedans, etc. », but this statement cannot be substantiated nor have Thomas Bowrey[2] (1669-1699) or William Hodges[3] (1681-1687) anything to say about Jewish merchants residing in Bengal. Reference is made to a prominent Jewish merchant, Jacob Jessurun Alvarez of London, who had visited another Jewish merchant by the name of John Mendes da Costa in 1679 in Calcutta and whose family conducted an immense business in the East Indies in the 17th century[4].

With the establishment of a Jewish merchant colony in Madras (Fort St. George) towards the end of the 17th century, however, a close contact between Bengal and Jewish merchants in London began to develop. Members of this group and their associates in London carried on commercial transactions with Bengal in search of new markets and new adventures, which the English East India Company in Madras had then greatly encouraged[5].

On December 12th, 1687, the East India Company in Fort St. George announced to its Factors in Bengal: « We have given permission to all our servants and all our freemen, English, Jewes, and other foreigners and Natives to send home upon our own ships consigned to your Company, any sort of Bengall Goods » and this reference to Jews, in connection with the Bengal trade, is again repeated in an announcement of September 11, 1698, where it is said: « we shall be competently supplied with goods from Benares, Pattana, Dacca, Maulda, and Cassimbazar by the permissive Trade allowed to Armenians, Portuguez, Banians, Jews, English,

1. *Voyage of François Pyrard*, ed. A. Gray and C. Bell, Hakluyt Society, London 1887, Vol. 1, p. 333. F. Pyrard was a keen observer and refers to Jews outside of India in a number of places. See *Jewish Quarterly Review*, o. s., Vol. 9, 1897, p. 173.

2. *A Geographical Account of the Country around the Bay of Bengal (1669-1679)*, ed. R. C. Temple, Hakluyt Society, 1905. He visited India 60 years after Pyrard.

3. *Travels in India during the Years 1680-1687*, London, 1793.

4. See L. Wolf in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, London 1889, Vol. 1, p. 440 and *Essays in Jewish History*, ed. Cecil Roth, London 1934.

5. See Walter J. Fischel, « The Jewish Merchant Colony in Madras (Fort St. George) during the 17th and 18th Centuries », in *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Leyden, 1960, Vol. 3, pp. 78-107, pp. 175-195.

and it may be Dutch and French which will remaine in Bengall and be glad of correspondence and other means of getting money by the English. »

It was particularly due to the initiative of Alvaro da Fonseca[1], from 1693 on, that the Bengal trade was developed on behalf of the Jewish merchants in Madras.

In 1694, direct connections with the English agent J. Charnock and Alvaro da Fonseca are reported for the first time. A transaction of great magnitude bearing on the Bengal trade took place in 1694 when Alvaro da Fonseca and Domingo da Costa offered the company to send on the ship « Saphir » 25,000 pagados to be invested in Bengal for permissive trade. The company was only too glad to accept this offer and even permitted them to defer and retain the departure of the « Saphir » for another day so that this great amount of money could be loaded. This shipment was accompanied by Mr. Domingo da Costa, « Mr. Alvaro's factor », mentioned several times, who, though taken ill, recovered in time to join the shipment[2].

While the records indicate the large extent and scope of the commercial transactions between Bengal and Fort St. George under Alvaro da Fonseca and his associates, they give no evidence that these early Jewish contacts with Bengal had led at this early juncture to any permanent settlement of Jewish merchants. The silence in the records seems to confirm this.

In the second half of the 18th century (1756/57), we hear of a certain Abraham Jacobs who, together with a prominent Armenian merchant by the name of Petros Arratoon, distinguished himself by sending supply to the English survivors of the «Black Hole» tragedy at Fulta[3]. « This Abraham Jacobs, who is expressly called « a Jew »[4] in a letter by his

1. See A. S. Diamond, « The Cemetery of the Resettlement », in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (= *JHSE*), London, 1960, Vol. 19, especially pp. 188-189.

2. See note 8, pp. 183-187 ; also, *Letters from Fort St. George*, 1693, pp. 27, 35.

3. The so-called « Black Hole » tragedy is still controversial. See the recent studies on this topic by B. K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company*, 1756-1757, Leyden, 1962 ; esp. Appendix III and IV, pp. 156-158 and his article in the *Journal of Asian Studies* 1959, Vol. 19, pp. 53-56. Ram Gopal, *How the British Occupied Bengal*, Bombay, 1963; Appendix, p. 351-357. M. Edwards, *The Battle of Plassy and the Conquest of Bengal*, London, 1963. See also S. C. Hill, *List of Europeans and others in the English Factories in Bengal at the time of the Siege of Calcutta in 1756*, Calcutta, 1902.

4. This Abraham Jacobs was erroneously taken to be an Armenian by H. E. A. Cotton, *Calcutta Old and New*, Calcutta 1907, p. 255, where reference

Armenian friend[1], was lauded not only for his endeavours to send food to the English prisoners but also for his manifold services rendered, as a confidential agent, to the English East Indian Company in Bengal[2].

The presence of « Jewish merchant, Joseph Israil Levy, in Bengal is indicated by his Will, written on January 2, 1772, while « living in Calcutta in the kingdom of Bengal ». How long he resided in Calcutta is not clear ; he must have been a wealthy merchant of London, for he left to his daughter Abigail the sum of 1000 pounds in the custody of Abraham Levy, another merchant of London, until her father's death in 1786[3].

The annals of the Jewish association with Bengal entered a new phase in the last decades of the eighteenth century thanks to the efforts of the Jewish merchant, Israel Levin Salomons[4], head of a large House of Trade in London, a merchant in diamonds, pearls, drugs, indigo, and other commodities, who was interested in furthering his trade connections with India by having a representative of his own firm reside in Bengal.

While the establishment and development of a Jewish merchant colony in the factories of the English East India Company in Surat[5] and in Fort St. George (Madras) had started already towards the end of the 17th century, the permanent Jewish association with Bengal — the third and most important of the presidencies of the English East India

is made to the « two Armenians, Coja Petros Arratoon and Abraham Jacobs ». But the fact that M. J. Seth, the historian of *The Armenians in India*, has excluded Abraham Jacobs from his account is conclusive enough. Seth refers also explicitly to Abraham Jacobs as a Jew in his study, « Khoja Petrus-Merchant-Diplomat » in *Indian Historical Record Commission*, Vol. 11, pp. 151-167; esp. p. 154.

1. This letter, dated January 25, 1759, was published in S. C. Hill, *Bengal in 1756-1757. A Selection of Public and Private Papers, The Indian Records Series*, London 1905, vol. 3, pp. 364-367; see also vol. 1, p. 41 CXV and CIIX.

2. For Abraham Jacobs' activities see *Index to the Press List of Ancient Records in Fort William, for the years 1748-1800*, esp. vol. 4 (1757-1758) pp. 54, 112, and 114 ; and *Public Proceedings 1757*, fol. 196-197; fol. 416 ; fol. 419-421.

3. See L. M. Friedman, « Wills of Early Jewish Settlers », *American Jewish Historical Society*, New York 1915, vol. 23, pp. 160-161. For further references to London Jewish merchants dealing with India, see *Transactions JHSE*, Index.

4. His middle name is frequently spelled Levine.

5. See the present writer's study on « Surat in Jewish History » in I. *Ben Zvi Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem 1964. « Sefunoth », Vol. IX, pp. 247-262.

Company — unfolded itself, however only towards the end of the 18th century, in the time of the Governor-General Earl Cornwallis (1786-1793).

## A. THE INDIA TRADE OF THE LONDON FIRM OF ISRAEL LEVIN SALOMONS

Who was this Israel Levin Salomons through whom Bengal entered the map of the Jewish Diaspora in the 18th century ? In vain do we search in the works of Anglo-Jewish historians for any details about Israel Levin Salomons and about the role which he played in the international trade during the 18th century. The few references to him in the literature speak of him in very general terms as « an opulent East Indian merchant of Dutch extraction »[1], as « a very wealthy East India merchant of Clapton »[2], « a respected wealthy merchant of the city of London »[3], without any further substantiation. Even these references are made only accidentally due to the fact that be was the father of Jessie, who was called « the richest marriageable Jewess in England », and who in 1787 became the wife of the famous Jewish banker and merchant, Benjamin Goldsmid[4].

Israel Levin Salomons, a pious Ashkenazic Jew, hailed from Amsterdam where his two brothers, Jacob Levin Salomons and David Levin Salomons, also prominent merchants, remained after Israel Levin Salomons moved to London in the early part of the 18th century. He married there his niece Hester (Ester) and they lived in London in a very commodious house at Clapton, known as « The White House », where they brought up their large family consisting of six sons and four daughters. The male children, Mark, Lionel, Benjamin, Simon, Henry, and Joseph adopted the name Prager and, though born Salomons, became known in the Jewish and general business world as Prager's. The four

1. J. Picciotto, *Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History*, Revised edition, by Israel Finestein, London, 1956, p. 241.

2. R. D. Barnett, « Anglo-Jewry in the Eighteenth Century », in *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History*, ed. V. D. Lipman, London, 1960, p. 60.

3. Paul Emden, *The Jews of Britain*, London, 1927, p. 89, note 1. In the *Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish Biography*, as planned by A. Hyamson, no place has been given to him or his family. See A. Hyamson, *Anglo-Jewish Notabilities*, London 1949, pp. 1-75.

4. Levy Alexander, *Memoirs of the Life and Commercial Connections of the Late Benjamin Golsdmid*, London 1808 — a strange and curious study.

daughters, Jessie, Louisa, Harriet and Matilda carried on the name of Salomons until their marriages[1].

During the many years of his residence in London, Israel Levin Salomons succeeded in building up a vast business concern and in acquiring a great fortune. The firm of Israel Levin Salomons had vast international connections with almost all the economic centers of Europe in the second part of the 18th century, and maintained close connections with many of the prominent Jewish merchants in Germany (Hamburg, Berlin, Königsberg, Hannover, Frankfurt, Stettin, Braunschweig), in Holland (Amsterdam, Hague, Rotterdam), in Belgium (Brussels, Ostende, Anvers), in France (Paris, Bordeaux, Nantes), in Italy (Livorno), in England (Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool), in Austria (Vienna), in Scandinavia (Copenhagen), in Russia (St. Petersburg), and even with Jewish merchants in the New World in the West Indies, Jamaica, and in North America (Charleston, Philadelphia).

Like many of the prominent Jewish merchants of London of the time, Israel Levin Salomons was engaged also in the India trade, dealing in such commodities as diamonds, pearls, and drugs, and had close business connections with several prominent merchants at Madras (Fort St. George) among whom figured foremost Moses de Castro and Jacob Barnet.

The House of the *de Castros* was a very powerful London merchant firm in the second half of the 18th century. Seven of their sons were connected with the diamond trade in various parts of the world and in particular with Fort St. George, India. There they became « constant inhabitants » in the service of the East India Company and were represented first by Samuel de Castro (d. 1779), who arrived in Madras for the first time in 1749. He owned, together with his partner David Lopez Fernandes, a house in Madras which, during the French siege of Madras, was ruined; they built a new house on Charles Street which then was sold to the government in 1754. Other members of the family of the de Castros who resided for several years in Madras were Daniel, David, Joseph, Isaak, and above all, Moses de Castro, all of whom got permission to engage in the diamond trade in India in return for the coral beads, amber, and bullion which were shipped from England to Madras.

1. Derived from Israel Levin Salomons' Last Will, preserved in the Somerset House under : MX 1788 Calvert, 99. The following details are based on private letters in the archives of the family of Israel Levin Salomons housed in the Public Record Office. About it, see below, under « Sources ».

This Moses de Castro, expressly called « a Hebrew Free merchant » was the last member of that great family of London merchants closely connected with Fort St. George. He arrived probably in 1766 from the Dutch West Indies, Curaçao. He is then regularly listed in the records as a « constant inhabitant » and mentioned as chief consignee at Madras of coral beads and other precious commodities. He was an agent for many Jewish merchants in Holland and England and became the senior partner of the London firm de Castro, Pelling, and de Fries in which, among others, Nathan and Ananian Modigliani, Ephraim D'Aguilar, Emmanuel and Jacob da Costa, Moses Franks, S. T. Gumpert, Moses Montefiore and others played an active part. When Moses de Castro decided to return to England, the Madras authorities recommended him highly to the Court of Directors in London, stating, « Mr. Moses de Castro has always conducted himself with so much propriety that we request he may have your permission to return to India should he apply to you for that purpose »[1].

The close business connections between Moses de Castro of Madras and Israel Levin Salomons of London are indicated in a number of letters covering the years 1781-1782. When Moses de Castro severed his connections with the London firm, he felt it important to inform his client, Israel Levin Salomons, in London, about this separation on July 31, 1782.

Of far greater significance for the future of the House of Trade of Israel Levin Salomons was the connection with another merchant residing in Fort St. George since 1777, namely *Jacob Barnet.* This Jacob Barnet, apparently a non-Jewish merchant[2], was a close business acquaintance of Israel Levin Salomons while still in London, and after his arrival in Madras, Barnet continued his contacts with Israel Levin Salomons and apparently had regular dealings with

1. For further references to the manifold activities of the de Castro family in Madras, see the publications issued by the Madras Record Office, Fort St. George, in particular the volumes classified as *Diary and Consultations* from the year 1754 on; see also H. D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800, Indian Record Series*, London, 1913, 3 volumes with a very helpful Index, and *Report on the Palk Manuscripts, Historical Manuscript Commission*, London 1922, p. 394.

2. Moses de Castro characterized him in a letter to Israel Levin Salomons as, « appearing to us to be an honest and well-meaning man, but extremely weak and inexperienced. » (CIII-I). Sir Elijah Impey calls him erroneously, « the Jew of Benares », in Bengal: *Past and Present*, Vol. 36, July-September, 1928, p. 31.

him, as available letters indicate, over a period of years from 1777/1779[1].

When J. Barnet obtained permission to leave Madras in 1779, after a two-years' stay there, and moved to Calcutta to reside in Benares in order to engage there in the diamond trade, he informed Israel Levin Salomons about this change as follows: « In January next, (1779) I shall quit this place (Madras) for Bengal having the greatest encouragement to make this step... I hope to gain a moderate fortune... ».

Indeed, Barnet arrived early in 1780 in Benares and an advertissement in the « Calcutta Gazette » (1780) stated: « Mr. Barnet of Calcutta, Free Merchant, having obtained permission from the Governor-General and Council to reside at Benares to execute commissions in the purchase of diamonds is induced to make a tender of his services to the gentlemen in India. »

From Benares, Barnet informed Israel Levin Salomons « I have purchased my diamonds with the greatest care and circumspection », hoping thus to continue the business connections with the London firm of Salomons.

Barnet's commercial transactions seem to have been profitable as can be derived from his optimistic reports (18 November 1780) to Israel Levin Salomons in London, in which he stresses that « the diamond trade is taking a favorable turn here ».

In the following years the contact between Jacob Barnet and Israel Levin Salomons continued so that Israel Levin Salomons remained well appraised of the prospects of the trade in diamonds and precious stones in Bengal.

Apart from Barnet's role as a supplier of diamonds and pearls for the London firm of Israel Levin Salomons, J. Barnet was apparently also responsible for the shifting of the commercial interests of Israel Levin Salomons from Madras to Bengal.

Prior to Mr. Barnet's settlement in Bengal he must have had some correspondence with Israel Levin Salomons in which he suggested that Salomons should send someone of his own family out to India to represent his business interests and to work with him jointly.

In view of the ever-increasing advantages which Bengal began to offer at this period, Mr. I. L. Salomons turned indeed his eyes toward Bengal. It is very significant that J. Barnet inquired in a letter of November, 1780 to Israel Levin

4. The following references to Barnet are based on bundles of letters in the Public Record Office under C111-1, C111-5, C111-7.

Salomons, « I wish to hear whether you have succeeded in getting your nephews out here. I shall have every accommodation ready for them upon their arrival here ».

It may well be that the suggestion of sending a representative of Israel Levin Salomons' firm to Bengal had remained a topic of discussion all through the years of Barnet's contact with Israel Levin Salomons. It took him five additional years, however, after the first inquiry in this respect made by Barnet in 1780, to come to an affirmative decision. It was only in 1785 that Barnet's suggestion to I. L. Salomons bore fruit. Apparently encouraged by Mr. Barnet's reports about the prospects of the diamond trade in Bengal and motivated by other economic considerations, Israel Levin Salomons undertook in 1785 a step which had far-reaching repercussions for the future economic development of his firm and which brought about a turning point in the Anglo-Jewish association with Bengal in general.

Israel Levin Salomons submitted on August 3, 1785, a request to the Court of Directors of the East India Company in London asking them to allow him to send « to India two gentlemen to reside at Benares for the purchase of diamonds on commission or otherwise with a view to the re-establishment of that trade ».

The necessity of submitting such a request to the Court of Directors was conditioned by the fact that Bengal at this juncture was closed to every European merchant except to officials of the Company, professional men, and those with great financial resources if and when they wanted to go to India. The Governor-General of Bengal had complete authority over the admission of Europeans to Bengal[2].

Apart from the patronage system which affected greatly at that time the selection of English merchants who were permitted to go to Bengal[3], Israel Levin Salomons' financial position and reputation in the commercial and financial circles of London carried considerable weight. He had been for many years a large proprietor of East India Stock and was personally known to most of the Honorable Directors of the East India Company who respected him highly for his integrity, honor and respectability as a merchant.

Israel Levin Salomons' request was duly referred to the

1. See *Bengal Abstract Letters*, 1785, vol. 2, fol. 28, para. 9.

2. See V. A. Narian, « Restrictions on the Settlement of Europeans in India », in *Journal of Indian History*, 1963, vol. 41, pp. 481-487.

3. About the patronage system of the Court of Directors of the English East India Company, see *Cambridge History of India*, vol. 5, pp. 318-319.

Selection Committee of the East India Company and after further investigation and examination, the Court of Directors approved his petition on November 18, 1785, requesting him to name the person « who is to manage the diamond trade for him in Bengal... ». After the formal approval of his request by the authorities of the East India Company in London, Israel Levin Salomons submitted on February 1, 1786, the name of his representative in Bengal — this was Lyon Prager[1].

## B. LYON PRAGER — HIS LIFE AND ACTIVITIES IN INDIA

### 1. *Sources*

Who was this Lyon Prager, who was selected and chosen to be the representative of the firm of Israel Levin Salomons to go to Bengal? In the initial stages of our search for data on Lyon Prager's life, we could be guided only by the inscription on his tombstone, thus establishing at first the place of his burial and the date of his death. His burial place was the Old English Cemetery in Kalkapor and the inscription reads:[2]

« Here lie interred the remains of Mr. Lyon Prager, Diamond merchant and Inspector of Indigo and Drugs to the Honorable East India Company. He died at the factory house of Cozimbazar on the 12th day of May, 1793, aged 47 years, having fallen a sacrifice to the severe heat of the climate from travelling a pelanguin from Calcutta.

Possessed of the most mild and affable manners, just and upright in all his dealings, he was universally respected by his own countrymen and the native merchants of India with whom he had extensive concerns. »[3]

1. Israel Levin Salomons was also permitted « to name one of our servants (of the East India Company) in Bengal to join Mr. Prager in the said business. The person so to be named by Mr. Salomons must execute a like deed of Covenant as that executed by Mr. Prager here (London)...and it must also be executed by Mr. Salomons who will send a letter of attorney with Mr. Prager for that purpose ». This possibility was apparently not utilised by Israel Levin Salomons.

2. See C. R. Wilson, ed., « List of Inscriptions on Tombs or Monuments in Bengal, Possessing Historical or Archaelogical Interest », *Indian Monumental Inscriptions*, 1896, vol. 1, pt. 2, no. 691, p. 180.

3. My efforts to obtain a photographic copy of this inscription during my stay in India met with considerable difficulties. Through the good offices

This tombstone inscription could have given rise to doubts as to whether the deceased Lyon Prager would fall within the scope of our research and whether he was a Jew at all, in view of the location of this tomb in a Christian English cemetery, the absence of any Hebrew words or phrases and the lack of any indication on it of his religious or ethnic background. On the other side, the omission of the usual formula in tombstone inscriptions, such as, « In the year of our Lord », or so, was suspicious.

In the light of additional biographical details found subsequently it can however be firmly established that Lyon Prager was an Ashkenazic Jew and, what is more important, he was the nephew of Israel Levin Salomons and at the same time his brother-in-law, being the brother of Mrs. Hester Salomons, the wife of Israel Levin Salomons. Lyon Prager, born in 1746, in Amsterdam, was the son of the prominent Jewish merchant Jacob Levin Salomons. After having worked in the business of his father for many years in Holland and also in Belgium (Ostende)[1], he joined the business of his uncle, Israel Levin Salomons, in London. He must have gathered great experience in various branches of trade and commerce and his competence and efficiency made him the proper choice when Israel Levin Salomons of London decided to send a representative of his firm to India to carry on the diamond trade in Bengal and to establish a more permanent link between London and Bengal.

In search of further details on Lyon Prager, the available English written literature on the economic history of Bengal

of Dr. P. M. Joshi, the Director of Archives and Historical Monuments of the Maharashtra Government, Bombay, who was most helpful to me during my 6-months' stay in India in 1963 — my request was transferred to the Superintendant of the Archeological Survey of India, in West Bengal, Calcutta. I was finally informed, in February, 1964, « that the unprotected tomb of Lyon Prager said to have been erected at Kalkapur (Kalikapur) could not be located by our photographer who went there for photographing it. I am, therefore, not in a position to supply you the required photograph ».

This negative reply, indeed confirmed the observation of Major J. H. Tull Walsh, who stated: « There were two cemeteries in Kasimbazar, one belonging to the English residents, and the other to the Dutch... Many of the monuments had disappeared and the memorial tablets are missing from many of such as remained to be restored. The tomb of Mr. Lionel (!) Pragel (!) diamond merchant and inspector of Indigo and Drugs to the East India Company, is no longer to be found in the Old English Cemetery. » (*History of Murshidabad District*, London 1902, p. 78).

1. There seems to have existed a firm, Prager and Company, in Ostende around the year 1781 in which Lyon Prager was employed prior to his going to London.

of that period did not help us[1]. Since Lyon Prager was called « Diamond merchant and Inspector of Indigo and Drugs to the Hon. East India Company », it was natural to turn to the original and primary records and files of the English East India Company.

Indeed, this search in the National Archives in New Delhi, in Fort William, Calcutta, in the Library of the India Office (Commonwealth Relations Office), London, and other manuscript collections, yielded an unexpected abundance of details about Lyon Prager's commercial activities[2].

The most important mine of information, supplementing

1. To the economic historian of Bengal, Lyon Prager remained until now unknown. One of the earliest references to Lyon Prager, as far as it could be ascertained, is to be found in the *Economic Annals of Bengal* by J. C. Sinha, London, 1927, who refers to « one Mr. Lyon Prager had been permitted to proceed to Benares and reside there for purpose of trading in pearls, diamonds, and other precious stones... », pp. 45-46. H. Furber quotes this passage from Sinha, but his statement that Lyon Prager was « the son-in-law of Mr. Salomons » who was sent « by order of the Court of Directors to Benares » must be corrected in view of our records. See *The John Company at Work*, Cambridge, Mass., 1948, pp. 230-231; p. 294. See also K. Datta, *Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Conditions in the Eighteenth Century (1707-1813)*, Calcutta, 1961, p. 126.

Lyon Prager is mentioned in the « Notes on the Subscribers » to the book by Emin Joseph Emin, *Life and Adventures of an Armenian*, London 1792, 2d ed., Calcutta 1801, p. 503, and is identified there on the basis of the *Calcutta Gazette* of 1786.

2. With the help and guidance of the Index to the *Press Lists of the Public Department Records, 1748-1800*, Calcutta 1924, and the *Press List of Ancient Documents of the Imperial Record Office, Fort William*, covering the years 1784-1800, the pertinent references to Lyon Prager's commercial activities could be located. See, in particular: vol. 11 (1785-1787); vol. 12 (1787-1789); vol. 13 (1790-1792); vol. 14 (1792-1794); and further. *Bengal Public Consultations*, vols. 21-25; *Bengal Letters Received*, vols. 14-18, 1787 ff.; *Bengal Abstract Letters*, 1784-1797 ; *Bengal Dispatches*, vols. 16-18, 1786-1788 ; *Home Miscellaneous* I. O. series, vols. 45, 46, 50.

Of special relevance were the *Commercial Proceedings of the Bengal Board of Trade (1786-1793)*, copies of which were obtained through the good offices of Professor N. K. Sinha, Calcutta.

It is strange that Lyon Prager's activities are not at all mentioned in W. W. Hunter, *Bengal Manuscript Records*, A Selected List of 14136 Letters in the Board of Revenue, Calcutta, 1782-1807, London 1894.

It gives me great pleasure to express herewith my profound gratitude to Dr. Sourin Roy, Deputy Director of the National Archives in Delhi, to Professor N. K. Sinha of the University in Calcutta and the authorities of the India Office Library and of the Public Record Office, London, for assisting me in obtaining microfilms or photostats of the relevant source material used in this study.

the official documentation was, however, the material and documents discovered in what could be called the private archive of the firm and family of Israel Levin Salomons and Prager, housed in the Public Record Office in London. This huge and unique archive consists not only of hundreds of bundles of virtually thousands of bills, invoices, ledgers, account books, diaries, commercial and legal documents pertaining to the activities of the firm « Israel Levin Salomons, Prager and Company », but contains also the private correspondence which Lyon Prager had conducted from his headquarters in Benares and Calcutta with the home front, with Israel Levin Salomons and after his death with his widow, Mrs. Hester Salomons — Lyon Prager's own sister — and with his brothers and nephews and other associates of the firm. These letters were written not only in English or Dutch, but also in Hebrew and Yiddish — sent from Calcutta and Benares to London [1].

This primary source material, deposited in this archive, staggering in its abundance and bewildering in its complete lack of organization, unfolds the vast ramification of Lyon Prager's personal and commercial activities in Calcutta and Benares [2].

When we add to all this another category of primary source material, namely legal procedures, litigations, and Last Wills [3], we have obtained a broad basis of documentary evidence enabling us to rescue out of oblivion Lyon Prager's activities

1. This source-material is classified as « Elliott vs. Willis, Estates of Mr. Salomons and Lyon Prager, Diamond Merchants Business Correspondence in English, Hebrew, Yiddish, etc. » Chancery Masters Exhibits, List II It covers the bundles marked as C111-1 to C111-17, and C111-146 up to C111-160, and C12-653-4.

2. The state of preservation of these bundles of documents, the complete lack of organization of the material according to any topical, chronological or linguistic criteria, does exclude for the time being, at least, the usual scholarly references to page, folio, etc. The indication of C111 — unsatisfactory at is is — can only be a guide for those who want to search further for the documentary evidence. It would be a formidable undertaking to publish all these letters, diaries, and documents *in toto* — indeed a worthwhile contribution to the economic history of Anglo-Jewry. The author hopes to find the time one day, to publish the whole material.

It seems that only Mr. G. Yogev of Jerusalem has made use of the material for his Hebrew-written dissertation on *The Economic Activity of Anglo-Jewry in the Eighteenth Century*, still unpublished.

3. See Literary Department, Principle Probate Registry, Somerset House, London, and « Anglo-Jewish Wills and Letters of Administration », by Arthur P. Arnold in *Anglo-Jewish Notabilities, Their Arms and Testamentary Dispositions*, London 1949, pp. 129-225.

in the commercial arena of Bengal and to write a hitherto unknown chapter in the annals of the Anglo-Jewish association with India.

## 2. *Lyon Prager—Diamond Merchant in Bengal*

The decision of the Court of Directors in London to allow Lyon Prager to proceed to Bengal was duly conveyed to the Governor-General and Council at Fort William in Calcutta, the Earl Cornwallis, on March 8, 1786. stated the news that, « at the desire of Mr. Israel Levin Salomons a very respectable merchant of the city (London), we have permitted Mr. Lyon Prager to proceed to Benares and reside there seven years to carry on trade in diamonds and diamond boart and other precious stones and pearls, ... subject to the conditions and stipulations contained in our agreement made between the Company and Messrs. Salomons and Prager »[1].

Lyon Prager's appointment as diamond merchant for a term of seven years in Bengal was regarded by the Court of Directors in London as « of very great importance to the Company to restore the trade in order to render it an advantageous mode of remittance of private property and to secure a regular and fair payment of the duty due to the Company in respect to such trade »[2]. The authorities in Fort William were therefore instructed to afford Lyon Prager every protection and assistance in enabling him to carry out that trade to the best advantage and were directed that « all persons who now are or may hereafter be licensed to trade in diamonds must enter into a like obligation as Messrs. Salomons and Prager have entered into with us in England ». According to the usual procedure, Lyon Prager's appointment was consequently announced in the official « Calcutta Gazette » of September 1, 1786, in which it is stated:

*Advertisement*

« The Honourable the Court of Directors having permitted Mr. Lyon Prager to proceed to Benares and reside there for the purpose of trading in Pearls, Diamonds, Diamond Boart and other precious stones in order to afford to individuals means of remitting their property to Europe and to secure to the Company their accustomed duties, and having forbid in their General Letter of the 8th of March any European Company's Servant or other from dealing in these

1. *Bengal Abstract Letters, 1785-1794*, Vol. 2, fol. 28, March 1786.
2. *Bengal Dispatches*, vol. 14, fols. 434-437, para. 8, 10.

articles for the Europe Market unless they entered into Covenants similar to those which Mr. Prager has subscribed to. Notice is hereby given that permission will not be granted to any person in future to carry on the above trade unless they conform to the Court of Director's orders by entering into the prescribed engagement which will be made known upon application to the Secretary to the Public Department. »[1]

Lyon Prager made himself soon acquainted with the conditions of the diamond market in Bengal[2]. He realized that the decline of the rough diamond trade was chiefly due to a lack of judgment of those employed in making the first purchase and to the illicit trade carried on in that branch to the great detriment of the Company and the fair trader. He promised the Government that his agents will see to it that all rough diamonds purchased by them for the European markets shall be sent first to the authorities to be registered on the manifest of the ships they are sent by and that those who remit through his agents will be perfectly secure. The loss of the Company in recent years was according to his view due also to the fact that rough diamonds were sent unregistered and in consequence without payment of duties and that by avoiding this procedure he will without any

1. *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 21, fols. 487-488. The announcement in the *Calcutta Gazette* evoked immediately interest among other Europeans in Bengal, who, eager to engage in the diamond trade, wanted to enter into Covenants with the East India Company similar to that of Lyon Prager and Israel Levin Salomons.

See the petition of Mr. Le Blanc to James Grant, the English Resident in Benares, asking for a copy of the terms of agreement between the Company and Lyon Prager. Bengal Public Department, O. C. November 1786, no. 19.

See also the application of J. Fowke to the Governor-General, Earl Cornwallis: « Being desirous of continuing a trade in diamonds which I have practiced without any censure from my superiors for above these forty years past, I beg that I may be permitted to enter into covenants similar to those which Mr. Prager has entered into with the Company... and without which I cannot become a purchaser of diamonds. » Public Department, New Delhi, O. C. November 19, 1787, no. 10.

2. Soon after Lyon Prager's arrival in Calcutta, he signed an agreement with a Bombay merchant by the name of Thomas Wilkinson a « junior merchant in the service of the Honor. Company upon the Bombay establishment », in which was stipulated that: « the said Thomas Wilkinson engages not to purchase any diamonds or pearls or employ any other person or persons or be concerned directly or indirectly in purchasing any diamonds or pearls in the kingdom of Bengal without permission in writing from the said Lyon Prager and that he will not instruct any other person in that business to the prejudice of the other parties contrary to the intent and meaning of this agreement... ». *Bengal Despatches*, vol. 17, fol. 520, no. 17; C111-16, C111-17.

expense to the Company secure for its revenue a sum upwards of 20,000 pounds per annum.

In order to carry out his assignment with a maximum benefit for his firm in London as well as the East India Company in Fort William, he submitted a memorandum to the Governor-General in which he set forth a number of fundamental points « relative to the permission granted to me for restoring the trade of diamonds, pearls and precious stones on a permanent footing ».

In this letter he sought the consent of the authorities for « an exclusive appointment » and requested:

« When I purchase diamonds or pearls at Benares for Europe that I have liberty to deliver the same made up in bulses sealed, to the resident in order to be by him forwarded under a proper guard to Calcutta, to be registered in the Company's Manifest... that no person be permitted to deal in diamonds or pearls unless he signs similar covenants to mine... »

He added:

« That if any person who is not permitted by the Company should be suffered to reside there and purchase diamonds and pearls without entering into the like covenants he would not only have many advantages but it would frustrate the intent and meaning of the Company and at the same time be a material interruption in my improving and re-establishing that valuable branch of commerce; and in contradiction of the particular direction given in the 10th paragraph to prevent any improper interference therein... »

Finally he asked that for the purpose in mind, namely the restoration of the diamond trade in Bengal, that the Governor-General and Council in Bengal afford him every protection and assistance in their power, trusting « that I shall meet your countenance and assistance under which alone my plan can succeed ».

One of the difficulties which Lyon Prager faced in his new assignment was the question of security and risk involved in the dispatch of diamonds from Benares to Calcutta. The Governor refused to subject the Company to the risk or the expense of sending down diamonds from Benares to Calcutta but informed Lyon Prager, on October 4, 1786, that whenever he shall have a considerable quantity equal in value to two Lacks of rupees, they will afford him a guard to attend them down in his boats, this guard to be first furnished by the

Resident of Benares upon his application and to be relieved at the different stations...[1].

The trade in diamonds conducted by Lyon Prager in Bengal became a source of great income not only for the Bengal Government but also for the firm of Israel Levin Salomons in London. A detailed picture of the scope, volume, and magnitude of the diamond trade as carried out by Lyon Prager and of his remittances to England in the form of diamonds we can derive firstly from the annual reports and accounts which Lyon Prager was requested to send to the Governor-General listing all his transactions in the diamond trade. Following this instruction Lyon Prager submitted at the beginning of March of each year these annual accounts which are preserved all through the years from 1787 on and which were accompanied by a uniform letter, the text of which was:

« Conformable to a clause in the laws in my covenants with the Honourable East India Company I am to deliver an annual account affirmed on oath of all diamonds, diamond boart and other precious stones and pearls purchassed by me and sold or otherwise disposed of, either for the purpose of being sent to Europe or for any other purpose, specifying what part thereof was bought for my own account or upon commissions with the value thereof which account is to be made up to this day and to be delivered to the Right Honourable, the Governor-General in Council which I have the honor to transmit here inclosed, and request may be presented this day accordingly. »[2]

Of utmost importance for the understanding of Lyon Prager's diamond trade from Benares and Calcutta to London are the private letters which he sent at regular intervals which contain a complete listing of all the transactions of

1. In Benares Lyon Prager associated himself with a Mr. Thomas Scott, a British subject. It was due to Lyon Prager's intervention that Mr. Scott was permitted to proceed to Bengal and reside with him at Benares, after having given « the customary security to the Company in England for his good behavior ». Mr. Scott stayed in Lyon Prager's residence and a close friendship developed between them. When Thomas Scott's licence expired Lyon Prager submitted on January 1788 a special petition to the Governor-General, Earl Cornwallis, to extend the permit of Mr. Thomas Scott, which was granted.

See *Public Proceedings*, Bengal O. C. no. 18, January 14, 1788, fols 276-277. In Lyon Prager's Last Will Thomas Scott, « a good friend », was also made beneficiary of a certain bequest.

2. *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 25, 1787 and parallel versions of the following years until 1792.

diamonds, pearls and other commodities shipped by Lyon Prager to London with accounts, invoices, with exact indications of quantity and value and the proper markings of all bulses and parcels.

Through these sources we get an insight into the mechanics of the diamond market, the cost of the purchases, matters of freight and insurance, losses and risks, which throw light on the fluctuation of the diamond market and all other factors which determined the prices of diamonds[1].

In these letters he speaks also of his own standing and reputation within the merchant-colony of Bengal in such terms as « my business is all real and my credit here cannot be greater than it is »; « when I offer as security a box of diamonds none desire it », or « I can get as much money as I wish on my own credit, I would rather do no business than to run a risk » or « the principle cause of my great credit is that I never borrow any money from others unless at a very moderate interest rate »[2].

Far from being dry business accounts many of these letters have a very personal touch and mirror Lyon Prager's mood, hopes, aspirations and disappointments. When the diamond market declined, he stated, « this shortens my days — great losses to have after one year of hard work in this climate is not to be borne »; or, « if, God forbids, in my future, I do not find great profits on my diamonds then I do not remain here — or otherwise I must try with another », probably under the impact of some competition or disappointment he remarked, « I shall be obliged to give up the diamond business ».

Despite disappointments and difficulties Lyon Prager seems to have been satisfied with the progress he made in the diamond trade, which he could put on new foundations. In a letter to the Governor-General on May 16, 1789, he stated with satisfaction, « I beg leave to state to your Lordship, that I have been able in a great measure to fulfill the intentions of the Honourable Court of Directors, by

1. See « Diamonds Received on Joint-Account from Lyon Prager in Calcutta, consigned to myself [Hester Salomons], Benjamin Goldsmid and Mark Prager ». In the Public Record Office Archive there are other « sale-books » and « books of account » of diamonds and pearls purchased by Lyon Prager — containing highly informative material. See C111-146; C111-147; C111-152.

2. The following quotations are excerpts from Lyon Prager's letters preserved in the Archive and scattered throughout those bundles of letters mentioned above.

establishing the Trade of Diamonds on a permanent footing ».

He stressed in it the benefits the Company derived from his trade and stated « as the greater part of the diamonds I send home are afterwards exported for sale to all parts of Europe, they of course bring a further profit and add to the balance of trade in favor of Great Britain ».

« I hope the time may arrive, when the Company may think it advantageous to remit part of the revenues to England by this mode, as the remittance is given clear of all charges and payable at a short period. »

By this method of sending diamonds and other commodities to England as a profitable means of remittance of private fortunes to England, Lyon Prager applied the same principles by which English merchants in Bengal were guided throughout the 18th century and in which Lyon Prager played so important a role in the economic arena of Bengal[1].

### 3. *Lyon Prager — Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs*

The permission granted to Lyon Prager by the Court of Directors to settle in Bengal and to engage in the trade of diamonds did, in essence, not constitute an official appointment by the East India Company. He was a Free Merchant, but under the prevailing conditions he had to get the permission of the Company to reside in Bengal since it was in their hands to accept or reject any European who wanted to settle in Bengal and do any business. His activities in the diamond trade were basically of a private nature, regulated by an Agreement with the Hon. Company in Bengal.

Lyon Prager's activities as a diamond merchant in Benares

1. For an understanding of the social and economic background of Bengal during the period of Lyon Prager's activities, see the following works:

H. Sinha, *Early European Banking in India*, London 1927; J. C. Sinha, *Economic Annals of Bengal*, London 1927.; A. Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal (1786-1793)*, Manchester 1931; H. Furber, *The John Company at Work*, Cambridge, 1948; H. R. Ghosal, *Economic Transition in the Bengal Presidency, 1793-1833*, Cacutta, 1950; A. Tripathi, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency, 1793-1833*, Calcutta 1956; N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1956; vol. 2, 1962; K. Datta, *Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Conditions in the Eighteenth Century (1707-1813)*, Calcutta 1961; P. Spear, *The Nabobs*, London 1963 ; C. H. Philips, *The East India Company, 1784-1834*, Manchester 1948; L. S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, Oxford 1952.

See also the relevant volumes of the Fort William, *Indian House Correspondence*, covering the years 1786-1798.

constituted, however, only one phase of his manifold transactions in India. Driven by an enterprising and restless spirit, determined to make the fullest use of all the economic opportunities and advantages which his stay in Bengal could offer him, Lyon Prager sought to enter the service of the East India Company in Bengal also in an official capacity, namely as an Inspector and Purchaser of drugs for the European market.

While still in London, he submitted to the Court of Directors of the East India Company a memorandum on « the present state of your drug trade », in which he pointed out that the East India Company in Bengal was a considerable loser by importing drugs and « if you shall think proper to appoint me your Inspector and Purchaser of drugs I shall be able to establish from a declining and losing trade a most permanent and profitable one for the Company »[1].

He advanced his own personal qualifications for this task by referring to his own experience in the mercantile line stating: « The knowledge of the value of indigo, as well as of all other drugs can only be acquired by experience and attention. I have been employed in that branch of commerce upward of twenty years, and shall be happy to render your Board any assistance in my power... »[2]

In submitting his application for an official appointment he added that he could « enhance the benefit of the Company's trade to Europe and render East India Commerce a valuable connection to Great Britain by excluding foreigners and by making London the mart of the drug trade ».

The Court of Directors in London, impressed by Lyon Prager's background, ability and seriousness, hopeful of a renewed prosperous trade in drugs which would alter the constant anual loss in that field, was favorably inclined to accept Lyon Prager's suggestion and decided after some deliberations to appoint him « to be the Inspector and Purchaser of the Company's drugs for Europe ».

The Court of Directors in London made its decision known to the Governor-General and Council in Fort William and stated in an official dispatch of April 12, 1786, known as Paragraph 158[3]:

1. *Bengal Public Consultations,* vol. 24, fols. 435-436, also vol. 21, fols. 482-483, under February 1786.

2. This is an interesting biographical statement.

3. *Bengal Dispatches,* vol. 15, fols. 303-305 under October 13, 1707; also C111-17 and many parallel versions.

« Mr. Lyon Prager whom we permitted to proceed to Benares to carry on the Diamond trade, as advised in our letter of the 8th of March, having represented to us that if he should be appointed the Company's Inspector and Purchaser of Drug, he should be able to establish from a declining and losing trade a most permanent and beneficial one for the Company; and as a constant annual loss has arisen on the drugs imported on the Company's account from India, we have determined to accept Mr. Prager's proposal and accordingly direct that he be employed in the immediate purchase and inspection of the Company's drugs for Europe; and as a compensation for his services in this business, we have agreed to allow him a Commission of onetenth of the net average profits of such drugs as shall be bought under his immediate purchase and inspection and to pay the same to his attorney in England, valuing the current rupes at two shillings. »

On October 6, 1786, Lyon Prager submitted from Calcutta to the then Governor-General and Council of India, the Right Honorable Earl Cornwallis at Fort William a very illuminating letter:

« In conformity to the particular recommendation of the Honorable Court of Directors of the East India Company I find myself honoured with an appointment to be their Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs. I should be wanting in gratitude if I did not embrace every opportunity within the small compass of my abilities of rendering service to that community to which I am attached by a sense of the obligation conferred, and which I make no doubt will be confirmed, and supported by Your Honourable Board... »[1].

Lyon Prager outlined in this letter also some practical « Salutary regulations » and suggestions, among others « that in future all kind of drugs on account of the Company be purchased and inspected by me according to my appointment from the Honourable Court of Directors... that the Right Honourable Governor-General and Council give to their inspector and purchaser directions what amount they intend to vest in drugs every season... ».

He indicated also in this letter the kind of activities which he intended to pursue in his capacity as the Inspector and Purchaser of drugs and stated:

« From the singular situation which your inspector and purchaser of drugs will hold, he ought to be not only a perfect judge of the nature, use and of the different qualities of each article, but also, of the usual quantities annually consumed, and the variations of the value in Europe, which cannot otherwise be obtained than by keeping up regular correspondence for that purpose, and as he doth not reap

1. *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 24, fols. 435-436.

any emolument or benefit from the appointment, until the extent, and advantages of his services are demonstrated by the event of the sales in England, his benefits will chiefly arise by acting a fair, and just part betwixt the Company and the Merchants who have drugs for sale, which much encourage the cultivation, the growth, and manufacture thereof... ».

Lyon Prager declared finally:

« Should your Honourable Board confirm and approve of my appointment, I shall be ready to obey your commands and will discharge the duties of the trust with vigilance and integrity ; it will be requisite that the foregoing regulations be published, that every holder of drugs may know when, and where to apply to sell drugs to the Company... »[1].

a. *His Conflict with the Board of Trade at Fort William.*

Lyon Prager's appointment as Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs had an official character and had to be accepted and confirmed by the Board of Trade at Fort William[2], under whose control Lyon Prager would have to work in his new appointment.

The reaction of the Board of Trade in Fort William to Lyon Prager's appointment by the Court of Directors of London was far from being enthusiastic. The Board of Trade did not concur with the Court of Directors in London in regard to the authority given to Lyon Prager in his new assignment and challenged the appointment in its basic points.

They had very serious doubts as to the appointment of Lyon Prager for the task of Purchaser and Inspector of Drugs on various grounds and expressed their opposition to the London authorities, as attested by a bulky correspondence which dragged out for many months.

The delay in the confirmation of his appointment prompted Lyon Prager to write to the Board of Trade on January 29, 1787 « If it should be the intention of the Hon. Board to confirm me in the said appointment, I should request that I might be made acquainted with their pleasure as soon as possible... ».

1. Lyon Prager signed his Memorandum to the Governor-General with, « I have the honour to be with the highest respect your Lordship's most faithful and obediant Humble servant ».

2. The Bengal Board of Trade was established in 1774. About its function, see the *Cambridge History of India*, vol. 5, and N. K. Sinha, *l. c.*, p. 21, with many pertinent details as to the diamond and drug trades in Bengal at this juncture.

In order to speed up the matter, Lyon Prager even asked his family, the firm of Israel Levin Salomons in London, to intervene on his behalf. Israel Levin Salomons therefore asked the Company on April 18, 1787 « That certain regulations may be made to give effect to Mr. Lyon Prager's appointment as Company's Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs in Bengal »[1].

The powerful and influential position of Israel Levin Salomons did, however, in this instance, despite his prestige and manifold services to the East India Company, not produce the expected results and did not swing the pendulum in the desired direction.

What were the major points of disagreement? The Board of Trade objected to having committed « the purchase of so large a branch of their investment and so valuable an article as indigo to any single individual, to the exclusion of the Board they had appointed for the management of their commercial concerns... ». Furthermore, the Board of Trade was opposed to the combination and union of two so important assignments as the Office of Inspector and the Office of Purchaser in one person. « We cannot help remarking that uniting the offices of Inspector and Purchaser in one person is bestowing a degree of confidence and influence not possessed by any of your servants. We think he, or some other qualified person, might be regularly appointed Indigo Inspector, but we are fully of opinion that an independent uncontrolled power of providing as well as inspecting this large and valuable branch of the investment should not be committed to any individual. »[2]

There seemed to have been some apprehension also in regards to the union in one person of the role of a diamond merchant with that of an Inspector of and Purchaser of drugs. This combination seems at the beginning to have been taken for granted and not contested, as indicated in a letter sent by Lyon Prager on January 29, 1787, to the Governor-General asking for permission « to proceed on or about the fifteenth of this month to Benares in order to forward the plan of remittance in diamonds, unless the Company should

1. See Committee of Correspondence of April 18 and 24, 1787; *Bengal Dispatches*, vol. 17, fols. 516-523, no. 14.

2. *Bengal Letters Received*, vol. 25; § 23, § 34 *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 26, fols. 387-400.

require my attendance here, for the purpose of inspecting and purchasing any drugs... »[1].

The Board of Trade also took exception to the view held by Lyon Prager in regard to the alleged mismanagement of the drug trade in former years, and rejected his assertion that the decline of the drug trade and the annual losses had been the reason for his appointment and assignment to restore this trade.

b. *The Exclusion of the Indigo Trade.*

Apart from these objections in regard to Lyon Prager's appointment, the Board of Trade found that above all Prager's appointment according to Paragraph 158 was: « so general and indefinite that they are at a loss to know whether it was the intention of the Court of Directors to make Bengal the seat of the purchase of drugs from other parts of India, or what commodities they might understand to fall under the general denomination of drugs, to the exclusion of the 'Indigo Trade'. »[2]

The Board of Trade interpreted Paragraph 158 in such a way as to exclude the trade in Indigo as part of Lyon Prager's trade in drugs and contented categorically that « Indigo is not to make any part of his drug investment » and regused to regard « Indigo as being comprehended under the heading of drugs », as « falling within the description given of the Company's drug trade here ».

Despite all the vehement objections of the Board of Trade, Lyon Prager did not give in and fought for his way of interpreting the text of his appointment by the Court of Directors and tried to convince the Board of Trade rather forcefully that their arguments concerning the alleged incompatibility of the same person functioning as Inspector and Purchaser

1. It should be recalled that one of the stipulations in the Covenant between Israel Levin Salomons and Lyon Prager was « that during the residence of the said Lyon Prager in India, pursuant to and under authority of the licence aforesaid, he shall not nor will carry on, or be concerned in any other Trade or Traffick whatsoever than the said Trade in Diamonds and Diamond Boart, and other precious Stones and Pearls... ». But this stipulation does not seem to have excluded Lyon Prager's function as Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs and had not been an issue in the discussions with the Board of Trade. See *Bengal Public Proceedings*, vol. 29, pp. 713-715; *Bengal Dispatches*, vol. 14, fols. 434-437; and *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 24, fols. 434-438; *Public Department O. C.*, New Delhi, January 29, 1787, nos 17, 18.

2. See *Bengal Public Consultations*, range 3, no. 126, fol. 787.

of Drug and the place of indigo within the general investment of drugs assigned to him were not justified and tenable[1].

He fought, however, a losing battle. The Court of Directors, in its letter of July 31, 1787 to the Governor-General at Ft. William, decided finally to restrict Lyon Prager's appointment to the purchase of Drugs only and advised the Board of Trade[2], « that Mr. Prager be not considered Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs for the Company in the manner stated by him in his said letter..., that he be restricted to the purchase of such drugs only on the Company's account as the Board of Trade may deem it for the Company's benefit to purchase through him, and that he do on no account make any purchases as in the articles of opium, indigo and salt peter »[3].

The Board of Trade explained on March 28, 1788, « It was by no means our intention to prevent the full exertion of Mr. Prager's judgment in this branch of our investment respecting the quality of assortment of the drugs to be in future purchased on the Company's account since our sole motive for bestowing this appointment on Mr. Prager proceeded from an opinion that through his endeavors this article which has hitherto proved in general a losing one would be productive on the sales in England and of considerable profit »[4].

The result of the long proceedings and negotiations which lasted for over one year remained « that indigo was excluded from the category of drugs to be purchased by Lyon Prager, and does not rank under the general denomination of drugs ». This became a « permanent resolution of the Board ».

Despite the divergence of views there was never any doubt as to the qualifications of Lyon Prager for his assignment

1. *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 21, fols. 482-483 of January 31, 1787. Lyon Prager regarded the steady decline of the drug trade and the annual losses suffered by the Company as a major reason for his appointment and assignment to restore this trade. He stated expressly, « A constant experience of an annual loss for ten years in the drug trade determined them to accept my proposals as mentioned in the general letter and to give me the control and purchase of their investment of drugs for the European market. » *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 21, fols. 482-483.

2. *Bengal Dispatches*, vol. 17, fols. 516-517, no. 14.

3. The Company denied Lyon Prager also the right to act as a free merchant in the drug business and pronounced, « With respect to the part of Mr. Salomons' request, that we would permit Mr. Prager to act as a Free Merchant we have determined not to comply therewith. » *Bengal Dispatches*, vol. 17, fol. 518, no. 16.

4. *Bengal Public Consultations*, vol. 21, fols. 482-482. See also C111-17.

nor as to his integrity and professional ability. His « superior skill » was highly lauded and repeatedly the view is expressed,

« We think Mr. Prager's skill should by all means be made use of on contracting or bargaining for indigo and in appreciating it when received ; we think he, or some other qualified person, might be regularly appointed Indigo Inspector, but we are fully of opinion that an independant uncontrolled power of providing as well as inspecting this large and valuable branch of the Investment should not be committed to any individual. »[1]

While this dispute between Lyon Prager and the Board of Trade went on, Lyon Prager carried out a number of commercial transactions as purchaser and inspector of drugs, excluding indigo, and was called in conjunction with others « to inspect and report on the propositions and samples of indigo offered for contract for that season ».

The Company also advanced him large sums for the purchase of drugs and on various occasions he was called upon « to furnish a list of such articles as are classed under the head of drugs, that will answer the Europe Market, and are the produce of these provinces. Also of such articles as he recommend to be purchased on account of the Company, and of such as he wishes to send home on his private account ».

He was permitted to draw to a certain limit on sums whenever a drug investment seemed to be profitable and advantageous for the Company.

At the same time Lyon Prager was allowed to trade « on his own account » without any hindrance; even the necessary tonnage on the Company's ships was granted to him in return for the payment of freight and duties.

The question of Lyon Prager's salary was also a matter of discussion. At first Lyon Prager left any remuneration open « until your Honourable Court shall be convinced of the extent and advantages of my services by the event of the sales in England ». In July, 1787, he was informed that the Board had agreed « that Mr. Prager's allowance, if employed, be one tenth of the net average profit, realized in England on the Drugs so purchased by him after deducting the amount of freight duty, charges, insurance and interest valuing the current rupees »[2].

At a later date, when Lyon Prager's activities proved to

1. *Bengal Dispatches*, vol. 17, fol. 518, no. 150; *Bengal Abstract Letters*, vol. 2, fol. 116.

2. *Bengal Dispatches*, vol. 18, fols 266-273, no. 21, under March 28, 1788.

be successful, he submitted a request for « augmentation of salary » and stated:

« I beg leave further to represent to your Lordship that I have held the appointment as Company's Inspector of Indigo since the year 1787. The obvious increase of the cultivation and manufacture of that valuable article of commerce since that period, I hope may be considered by your Lordship favorably to my present application for an augmentation of salary; more especially as I am under the necessity to leave my residence at Benares to attend to the service of the Company. My salary is only 500 rupees per mensem and my annual expenses to come to the Presidency and return are very great »...

As a further support for this application he stressed in a letter he wrote to the Board of Trade,

« ...you have since my arrival in India found me ever ready to assist in such employ wherein you thought my judgment would be of use. I shall continue meeting my endeavors to merit your good opinion; and I flatter myself with your support in an application I intend to the Governor in Council for a monthly pay for the services I have already, and may render in future by inspecting indigo. »

c. *His Resignation.*

Lyon Prager's employment as Purchaser and Inspector of Drugs under the control of the Bengal Board of Trade was from the very outset fraught with difficulties. The interpretation of his appointment by the Bengal Board of Trade, the limitations put in his way in regards to the indigo trade, seem not to have been compatible with Lyon Prager's individualistic approach to economic matters. He must have felt a certain cold and unsympathetic attitude toward him in the highest circles of the East India Company which indeed regarded Lyon Prager's fight for his point of view as arrogant and presumptuous. As a matter of fact, even the Board of Directors in London was in doubt as to Lyon Prager's motivation and wrote to the Board of Trade that they « have not the smallest reason to believe that the true interests of the Company in this or in any other instance are the primary objects in the conduct of Mr. Prager »[1].

This air of doubt and the general opposition and objection to his views have prompted Lyon Prager to submit his resignation of his position as Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs on January 29, 1788. Though the Board of Trade prevailed on him to continue at least as Inspector of Indigo

1. C111-17 and C111-156.

[not Purchaser] for the Company and Lyon Prager resumed again his employment, he finally gave up a year later [December, 1789] and expressed in his official letter to the Governor-General as one of his motives for this step that

« ...the task is too difficult for an individual to act both as Inspector and Purchaser on account of the Company; especially the articles classed under the head of drugs are very numerous and the attention and responsibility the purchases require, I humbly conceive will be placed more properly with the Commercial Board. »

He came also to the conclusion that

« my services as the Company's Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs for Europe, have hitherto not proved so successful as I expected and could be wished, and therefore requested to resign, as the Company's commerce might suffer, by my continuing to hold it on the present terms. »

He added:

« It is a gratitude I owe to my Hon. Employers for the confidence they were pleased to place in me, as well as my Duty hereby to represent to your Lorsdhip my sentiments.[1]

« I therefore request your Lordship will allow me to resign, that Appointment, as the Company's commerce might suffer, by my continuing to hold it on the present terms. »[2]

This terminated Lyon Prager's official connection with the Board of Trade as Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs, but he continued in a private capacity as merchant in diamonds, drugs, and other commodities for many years to come.

From the sources available, particularly from the letters sent to his firm in London, we recognize that his business prospered in the diamond as well as in the indigo trade, which became the principle articles of his investment as the medium of remittance to England.

## 4. *Lyon Prager and the « Home Front » in London*

### a. *The Death of Israel Levin Salomons.*

Lyon Prager, the official representative and agent in India of the London merchant firm of Israel Levin Salomons,

1. *Bengal Letters Received,* vol. 26, pp. 387-400.

2. A copy of this letter and extracts of the correspondence with the Bengal Board of Trade are preserved in C111-17.

was not only heavily absorbed by those manifold business transactions which his position as diamond merchant and Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs demanded of him. He was also greatly burdened by the situation on the home front in London, and deeply concerned by the conflict and tensions within the family, which arose after the death of Israel Levin Salomons. He had died on February 8, 1788, and left a Last Will which was written in London in his own hand in the Hebrew language on 21 Shebat 5544 (January 3, 1784), rewritten and changed on March 17, 1786, signed by him with his Hebrew name Yechiel Prager and probated in February, 1788, by the Surrogate Court at London[1].

In it, he bequeathed to his widow, Hester Salomons, ten thousand pounds Sterling of « lawful money of Great Britain » and all his household furniture, effects, and belongings « provided she does not marry to any other person during her natural life », a provision which, as the testator explicitly stated, was inserted at her own request.

He had ten children, four daughters, Jessie, Louisa, Matilda, and Harriet; and six sons, Mark, Lionel, Henry, Joseph, Simon and Benjamin who were given the name of Prager « though born Salomons » and to each and every one of them he bequeathed the sum of 3,000 pounds.

He advised that

« the ten thousand pounds of my wife as well as the thirty-thousand pounds of my children shall be laid out in the best securities my executors shall deem the most advantageous in the interest thereof under the sole management of my wife and shall be used for the maintenance and education of the whole family. »

He stipulated that the three-thousand pounds

« for each of my children shall be paid to them either on the day of marriage or at the age of twenty-one years which may first happen provided they marry with the entire consent of their mother, else it shall be in the power of the executors to detain the money until they are twenty-five years. In case of death of one or more of my children before they come to the age of twenty-one years, the survivors or survivor of them shall and have share and share alike, added to their three-thousand pounds. »

He reiterated that

1. See Somerset House, 1788, Calvert 99.

« I leave entirely to the will of my wife and executors and my eldest son or to the major part of them to determine whenever my other sons come of age to join them also to the trade whenever if my sons should become of age and demands his money, such a son or sons shall have no further demand nor connection with the house and ceases the maintenance and education allowed him hitherto. »

His daughters were excluded from the business and he stipulated that

« none of the female children shall have any right to call for accounts books of trade as they actually have no share nor concern therein and... the above share only meant as a present during their unmarriage state. »

Of utmost significance for the future of his firm was his provision that

« the residue of all my effects and estate shall remain in the House of Trade under the management and direction of my wife and eldest son Mark Prager, born Salomons, as long as she shall find him to act proper and prudent but it shall at all times be in her power to do, cease and determine the trade. »

As his executors he appointed

« my dear and beloved wife, Hester Salomons and my brother Jacob Levin Salomons of Amsterdam and Mr. Willis. »

The Estate left by Israel Levin Salomons amounted to about £ 88,755 7 Sh 6 d, all of which was invested in the business. Since prior to his death, Israel Levin Salomons had committed himself heavily by purchasing a large quantity of camphire and drugs for a very high amount it was deemed essential for the sake of the continuation of the House of Trade to leave the whole capital within the firm for the time being without withdrawing any of those legacies which were bequeathed to his ten children.

According to Israel Levin Salomons' testamentary provision, his widow, Mrs. Hester Salomons, took over management of the firm and appointed her oldest son, Mark junior, as co-partner of the now entitled firm, « Israel Levin Salomons, Widow and Prager »[1].

In view of Mark Prager's youth — he was only twenty-two years of age — Mrs. Hester Salomons asked her brother,

1. This co-partnership was dissolved in 1791 due to reasons mentioned below.

Mark Prager, Senior, to function as her assistant in the firm, which he did until the end of 1793. In order to meet all her responsibilities, she ascertained in the management of the business also the help of two of her sons-in-law, Benjamin Goldsmid, the husband of her daughter Jessie, George Elliott, the husband of her daughter Louisa, and a Mr. William Willis, a good friend of the family, a London Bank executive[1].

Lyon Prager, who was in Calcutta when Israel Levin Salomons' death occurred, working hard to fulfill his duties as a representative of the London firm and as Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs for the East India Company, continued to adhere to a private agreement he concluded prior to his departure for Bengal in 1786 with Israel Levin Salomons in which the conditions were specified concerning his share in the profits of the trade from India, in his capacity as a representative of the firm of Israel Levin Salomons. His purchases and sales and all his transactions with the firm in London were based on a « joint-account » and all his shipments of diamonds, drugs and other commodities from Bengal to London were on a « half account basis ». This « joint-profit » basis remained the fundamental factor in his relationship with the London firm.

He repeatedly assured his sister, as expressed in many of his letters, that this joint-account relationship would be continued by him; and he took great care to advise his sister as to the sale and disposition of the merchandise he sent and the profits to be expected[2].

b. *The Widow, Mrs. Hester Salomons, and hers sons.*

The untimely death of Israel Levin Salomons and the preoccupation of Mrs. Hester Salomons, the widow, with the great business concern must have had an adverse effect on the upbringing and education of the children.

With her daughters she experienced no particular human difficulties. Jessie, the « richest marriageable Jewess in England » at that time, born in 1767, married in 1787 Benjamin Goldsmid, one of the greatest financial wizards of the time. Louisa married George Elliott, Mathilda married

1. About these men see later.

2. C111-16, C111-151. Lyon Prager was a most devoted brother and promised her repeatedly, « I will support you and those of your children that shall merit it as long as I exist. » See also some touching letters to his brothers Meyer and Mark sen., in C111-149.

David Alexander Lindo, and Harriet married Solomon Levin.

It was quite different with her sons. Her son Benjamin had died as a young boy and her other son Henry went to Jamaica in the West Indies in 1792, where he joined the firm of Lindo, Aguilar and Dias[1]. His son Simon stayed at home.

Another son, Joseph, went to the United States and entered the firm of Prager and Company in Philadelphia, headed by some relatives of the London Pragers[2].

The two other sons, Mark and Lionel, were indeed the two problem children of the family who, owing to their misbehavior and character, their lavish spending, the bad company they kept and their scandals, had caused their mother and the whole family great embarrassment and troubles. Due to the closely knit business-family relationship, these tensions affected to a large degree also the very existence of the firm.

Mark, who was taken into the business as co-partner with his mother, Hester, conducted himself, however, with great impropriety by squandering money of the firm, and taking out, without the knowledge of Mrs. Hester Salomons, the amount of £ 20,700, applying it for his own use in « gambling and other extravagancies ». Though Mark Jr. signed a bond and obligation acknowledging his debt to the firm with the promise to repay it, he was discharged from the co-partnership on January 27, 1791.

Lyon Prager was well aware of the situation on the « home

1. The private archives contain many letters to Henry Prager at Kingston in Jamaica, written in Yiddish. C111-12, C111-13.

2. In the available letters, written by Lyon Prager and by his brother George Prager, frequent references are made to the relatives in Philadephia, the firm of Prager and Company. The various commercial letters to Prager and Company indicate a rather regular relationship between the London House, the Bengal House, and the Philadelphia Firm of the Pragers which would need further investigation. In a letter of November 5, 1796, George Prager in Calcutta inquired about the prices of American stocks. See C111-6, C111-157.

On the Jews of Philadelphia, see Edwin Wolf, II, and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonian Times to the Age of Jackson*, Philadelphia, 1957. About early trade connections between Jewish merchants in America and India in the eighteenth century, see some scattered references in Publications of the American-Jewish Historical Society, New York, vol. 2, p. 82; vol. 23, 1915, p. 1; vol. 27, p. 239.

On this topic see also H. Furber, « The Beginning of American Trade with India, 1784-1812, *New England Quarterly*, vol. 11, 1938, pp. 235-265; H. R. Ghosal, « Indo-American Trade during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars », *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 41, 1963, pp. 421-429. See also the present writer's study on « From Cochin to New York » in the forthcoming *Harry L. Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, New York, 1965.

front » in London and reacted bitterly to this behavior of Mark Jr. in many letters to his sister and to his brothers Meyer and Mark senior[1].

« I see with the greatest sorrow that your son Mark continues to behave bad though at the same time I expected it while he stays in London and if he had an honest heart then he must be obliged to alter to everything that is bad, particularly since you have found out that he kept a false book with the banker, that is what I never could of thought of him and by my living soul I do not know what to do when he arrives here, or whether I shall protect him. I am surprised that you can have him in your sight. »

In another letter he expressed similar feelings to his sister:

« Your Mark's behavior was inhuman, in many instances unpardonable, after he had wrote me he had seen and confessed his faults and promised to alter to follow yet his bad and horrid ways leaves me little hopes that he will ever alter for the better, he must alter much and must go through a great deal before I shall put any confidence in him, and if it was not for your last letter to me in which you so strongly desire that I shall pardon and give him a chance, I do not believe that I should have acknowledged him for a reliable or an honest man. »

Even a more difficult character was Hester's other son, *Lionel.* He is described as a boy of « a wild and extravagant disposition » during his adolescent years, and in view of the bad company he kept and his behavior toward his family, it was thought advisable to remove him from home, and thus to eliminate the bad example of his conduct on his younger relatives. He was sent toward the end of 1789 to a house of correction in Loughborough, whose headmaster was a Dr. Roberts, where he stayed for eight months without, however, any improvement. He was then sent to Philadelphia [U.S.A.] to the care of his uncles, prominent merchants there, and the heads of Prager and Company. Wholly inattentive to business, Lionel returned to London in 1791 and continued to cause further troubles to his mother and family by borrowing and wasting money and living in an extravagant manner. Again it was thought prudent to send him out of the country, and through the intervention of Benjamin Goldsmid a Cadet-ship in the English East India Company in Bombay was procured for him.

Having reached the age of twenty-one, on February 14, 1792, he thought to be entitled to claim the legacy of his

1. The following quotations are culled from the various private letters.

late father to the amount of £ 3000. In view of the losses the firm had sustained due to the fall of prices on the market and due to Mark Jr.'s misconduct in the affairs of the firm, the amount claimed by him could not be paid out to him at this juncture without seriously injuring the trade of the firm and « greatly prejudicing the interest of the other parties concerned therein ». It was therefore suggested to let his share remain in the House of Trade for the time being. An agreement to this effect was signed between Mrs. Hester Salomons and her son Lionel on February 24, 1792.

Lyon Prager in Benares and Calcutta had received regular reports about Lionel's behavior, to which, in one letter, Lyon replied,

« That you suffer much with your son Lionel, must certainly give you a great deal of sorrow, in particular, since he is so near coming of age and keeps such bad company. I truly do not know what to advise you. That you have got a Cadet's place for him through the intervention of Benjamin Goldsmid from the Director, I hope that he will behave well in that situation, it would be more than I expect because he is a wild boy without education and one who follows his own bad ideas without thoughts... »

In 1793, after his return from India, Lionel initiated a law suit[1] against his mother and the firm and demanded in a memorandum submitted to the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, the Right Honourable Alexander Loughborough, a re-opening of the financial settlement, which had been made between himself and his mother. He accused his own mother of all kinds of devious manipulations, that he was pressed into the agreement by her and was compelled to leave the country. He raised also the point that with the early deaths of his brothers, Benjamin and Simon, both unmarried, their legacies became « distributable » and « lapsed and divisable » between and amongst the surviving children in equal shares and proportion.

The details of his claims and the whole process of litigation have been preserved, as well as the replies of the joint defendants, Mark Prager Sr., George Elliott, Benjamin Goldsmid and his wife Jessie, and of his own mother, Hester Salomons, all of whom deny « any unlawful combination and confederacy » against Lionel, and all confirmed that the settlement was conducted in a fair and correct spirit.

1. For the full text of this lawsuit see Public Record Office, C-12-653-4 of November, 1794. Many biographical data about Lionel and his family could be derived from this material.

c. *Mrs. Hester Salomons and her other associates.*

Lyon Prager was also kept informed about the dispute between Hester and her brother Meyer due to business disagreements, misunderstandings and jealousies. From the distance, Lyon Prager tried to straighten out these tensions and enjoined his brother Meyer on August 1, 1792,

« I observe with great sorrow and unhappiness that there exists such a disagreement between you and our sister Hester, it shortens my days to receive such miserable tidings constantly, particularly as I have for you both, as it ought to be with a true brother, indescribable love, whether you or my sister is to blame is now not necessary to decide because it can avail nothing, nor make any alteration, but I have to reproach you, after as you yourself say, that you have worked so hard and assisted as a true brother, in her unheard of miseries, and that at that time when she was in that desperate situation that you insisted that she should put her whole and sole confidence in you and that you have been so inconsiderate as to set up a House for yourself... »[1]

In a later letter [November, 1792], he defended the action of his sister by stating,

« I have known my dear sister Hetty many years longer than you for I was above 25 years in her own house with her. I have ever observed that her behaviour as wife, mother and my sister merited every respect. I have the greatest opinion of her virtue, honesty and modesty of our sister Hetty and for that reason I cannot believe that our Sister will ever do you injustice... »[2]

Lyon Prager's endeavors to help his sister and to regulate the home front in the most friendly manner seem to have yielded no results.

While thus the conflict within the family continued to absorb the energy and activity of Mrs. Hester Salomons, she was consoled and conforted by the devotion of two of her sons-in-law who had some share in the management of the business, namely Benjamin Goldsmid and George Elliott. Lyon Prager was happy to learn how both stood at his sister's side in all her troubles.

Lyon Prager had a most favorable opinion about George Elliott, and expressed his satisfaction to his sister that she had found

1. See letters of August 1, 1792 and of November 25, 1792, C111-149.
2. C111-149.

« such an able and honest man in Elliott and I approve much that he gets 1/2 of the insurance because he merits to be encouraged to make it worth while to take care of the business. »

He expresses his high regard for Elliott in another letter,

« If you know him as long and as intimately as I have you should have a better opinion of him and I am assured that he is not only capable but very genteel and honest and very much attached to all our family... you ought to esteem him the more... »

On another occasion, Lyon Prager admires Elliot for having given himself

« so much trouble to get the Books in order; it confirms me that I have not been mistaken in him, that he is a true friend of mine. I shall take care and remember to shew him that I feel the proper sense of his services. I shall write him by the ships of this season. »

In many letters, Lyon Prager refers also to *Benjamin Goldsmid*, for whom he had the highest regard. More than once he conveys through his sister his expression of thanks for all his attention and cooperation in guiding Mrs. Hester in difficult situations. Thus he states, « With Benjamin Goldsmid's behavior to you I am highly pleased. That he should take so much trouble without interest is more than I expect...he is too generous ». He even mentioned in a letter to his sister that, « in case of indisposition or death [so he writes on January, 1793] I have no doubt Benjamin Goldsmid will do the needful ». Lyon Prager remembered Benjamin Goldsmid also in his Will as « My friend ». For his activities in the firm of Mrs. Hester Salomons, Benjamin Goldsmid was granted a special commission for his trouble and responsibility in assisting her in the sale and disposition of the diamonds and other commodities which Lyon Prager had sent out to London[1].

Though the remarkable career of Benjamin Goldsmid and his great contributions to Anglo-Jewry have been expounded, his connection with the House of Salomons and Prager, beyond the fact of his being married to the daughter of Israel Levin and Hester Salomons, has, however, not yet been duly recognized. After his marriage to Jessie in 1789 he not only stayed for a while in the residence of his parents-in-law, but

1. Mrs. Hester Salomons bequeathed in her Last Will to her son-in-law Benjamin Goldsmid a certain sum, « as a small token in remembrance of the very great acts of kindness and friendship myself and family have received at his hands ».

participated actively in the firm of Israel Levin Salomons, especially after the death of Israel Levin Salomons in 1788.

As is well known his financial operations and wide international connections made him and his brother Abraham two of the wealthiest individuals in England and at the same time the pillars of all charitable Jewish and non-Jewish institutions[1]. He was praised as « an excellent husband, a tender father, and a hospitable neighbor », and his death in 1808, the result of a mental disturbance, was a shock and a great loss to Anglo-Jewry[2].

### d. *Lyon Prager's nephews' visit to India.*

Lyon Prager, who was acquainted with the situation at the home front through a long-distance correspondence with London, was directly confronted with it when his three nephews, Simon, Mark and Lionel decided to come to India and to seek employment, in one way or another, through the help of their uncle.

The first of the sons of Hester Salomons to come to Bengal was *Simon*. He arrived in Calcutta in March, 1792.

1. For his Last Will — perhaps the longest Will of a London Jew, comprising twenty-seven large folios — see Somerset House, 1808, Ely 654.

2. For further references to this remarkable banking firm of the Brothers Goldsmid see the following:

Levy Alexander, *Memoirs of the Life and Commercial Connections of the Late Benjamin Goldsmid*, London, 1808.

Emden, Paul H., « The Brothers Goldsmid and the financing of the Napoleonic Wars », London, The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1940. In *Transactions JHSE*, vol. 15, pp. 225-246.

Emden, Paul H., *The Jews of Britain : a Series of Biographies*. With a forward by the Rev. James Parkes, London, 1943.

Cope, S. R., « The Goldsmids and the development of the London Money Market during the Napoleonic Wars », London, the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1942; also in *Economics*, new series ix, pp. 180-206.

Bentwich, Norman de Mattos, « Anglo-Jewish causes célèbres: leading cases in the English courts from the beginning of the eighteenth century ». The Lady Magnus Memorial Lecture. London, The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1946. In *Transactions JHSE*, vol. 15, pp. 93-120.

Bentwich, Norman de Mattos, « More Anglo-Jewish leading cases », London, The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1952. In *Transactions JHSE*, vol. 16, pp. 149-162.

Hyamson, Albert Montefiore, « The Goldsmid Family: an Anglo-Jewish Family ». In *Transactions JHSE*, vol. 27, pp. 1-10.

See also Fritz Heymann, *Der Chevalier von Geldern*, Amsterdam, 1937, pp. 412-413; and the reference in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 32, *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, and the well-known Anglo-Jewish historians.

Lyon Prager, his uncle, took immediate care of him and helped to establish a business for him in Benares. Lyon Prager felt very much attached to his nephew whom he « esteemed as my own son ». He took him on various business trips to Benares and informed his sister on August 12, 1792, « I have established a house and associated him therein, in a place about 40 miles hence (from Benares), Mirzapoor, where great business is carried out in all goods, particularly in sugar, cotton, etc. ».

All through the year 1792, Lyon Prager sent regular reports about Simon's activities to his sister from which we learn that

« Your son, Simon, is with my approval, gone to Benares. My first reason is now that I have Mark here, I have enough assistance not having continued employ for both; secondly, to assist him in his own House which begins to get pretty commissions. He is, thank God, much altered and I hope we may live to see pleasure of him. »

This nephew Simon could not enjoy his new activities in Bengal for very long. He died suddenly at the age of twenty on December 13, 1793, only six months after the death of his uncle Lyon, and Mr. Edward Morris of Calcutta had again the sad task, at the request of his mother, Mrs. Hester Salomons, to administer his Estate and to enact the various procedures connected with the settlement and liquidation of his business in Bengal.

It is significant that the death of her son Simon was related to her by her relatives in America, according to a letter written by her to E. Morris on June 19, 1794, saying:

« I am again afflicted by the news of my poor son Simon's death, which came from you to my brother's in America. This is additional misery to me but I dare not think. »

*Mark Jr.*, also, came to Calcutta to visit his uncle and after his arrival in Calcutta was taken into the business of Lyon Prager. Lyon Prager was happy to inform his sister on July 26, 1792:

« I keep him under my own eye as much as possible, at the same time not too sharp and I give him as much money as I think it necessary for him to spend, that he may not be obliged to go to borrow which would be a great shame as well to him as me. »

Lyon Prager's view about his personality is expressed in the following to his sister:

« I can inform you that your son has bettered himself much here and he begins to talk the language very properly, but he must yet alter a great deal and to grow a little solid, before I can put my trust in him. »

And again,

« Your son Mark is with me and assists me with all his power, and I hope he will know how to conduct himself, that I may forget his past conduct. I am much inclined to it... »

As a whole, Mark Jr. seemed to have considerably improved and became quite a help in the conduct of his uncle's business[1].

*Lionel Prager* also came to India to assume his appointment as a Cadet in Bombay. After his arrival in Bombay on July 4, 1792, Lionel informed his uncle of his intention to come to Calcutta. « He begs me » — so did Lyon Prager inform his sister in London — « to try to get him permission to come to Bengal that he will write me further and expect from me letters of recommendation. I shall write him and answer and try to think how to make him happy if he behaves moderate. »

Lyon Prager could arrange for him to come to Calcutta and Benares but shortly after his arrival, Lyon Prager could not help writing to his sister on July 26, 1792:

« Lionel is here [Benares] likewise. His conduct since he has been in India is the same as when he was in London. Take no notice of him. He is much in debt as well at Bombay as here and I will not pay it. He must go back or else he will be in prison here... I hope God that we may receive good accounts of him, his income is very little; if he lives with the greatest economy he can scarcely maintain himself on that account, there is little chance that he can behave well... »

Again, as in London so in India, Lionel ruined his reputation by borrowing money from different people and by drawing unauthorized bills on his mother's name. Despite the promise of a handsome allowance from his family and his uncle, Lyon Prager, in case he would conduct himself with

1. Later, however, Mark Jr. fell back to his previous vices, as indicated by a letter to Mrs. Hester Salomons in London, dated September 10, 1796, in which she is informed that Mark has gone back to Europe as purser of the ship « Houghton » and that he had been obliged to run away « as I hear, due to gambling ». And, he added, « If I consider the life Mark has led here I grow melancholy to see that he was under such sharpers who had him so under. I will not write more about it. I do not sleep for heartaches in all... ». CIII-151.

propriety, he left his station as Cadet at Bombay and returned to England around July, 1793[1].

### 5. *Lyon Prager: the end of his carrer.*

#### a. *His death and funeral.*

According to Lyon Prager's contract with the East India Company of March, 1786, he was permitted to reside in Bengal for seven years[2]. This would have been March 6, 1793. When the end of the seven years approached, Lyon Prager submitted a memorandum to the Governor-General and Council at Fort William in which he requested a renewal of his contract and permission to stay on in Bengal for another period of seven years.

This permission was granted to him[3] and as Lyon Prager informed his sister in London, « they have, thank God, granted this without any opposition whatever ».

Lyon Prager, full of an enterprising spirit entered, at this juncture, March 20, 1793, into an agreement with a silk merchant, Mr. Peter Touchet, a resident of Radnagore, for the supply of raw silk and indigo to the amount of 30,000 rupees. It was agreed that the commodities were to be sent to Mrs. I. L. Salomons in London on one of the company's chartered ships and all the other details arising out of such a transaction were specified[4].

On May 7, 1793, Lyon Prager wrote again to his sister giving the usual reports about his commercial activities, sales, and consignments of diamonds, and enjoined his sister «you must have entirely the direction of selling the diamonds ». In this letter which expressed an air full of confidence and optimism, Lyon Prager mentions also that

« Lord Cornwallis intends to return from hence in August, he is very friendly with me as also Sir John Shore shows me the greatest respect possible. I shall without doubt have greater opportunity through him to be of more service to the Company... »

1. It was then that Lionel brought suit against his mother as detailed in C12-653-4.

Lyon Prager was spared the sad spectacle of Lionel's litigation against his mother, having died prior to this event.

2. See above, p. 17.

3. *Bengal Abstract Letters*, vol. 2, fol. 140-141, no. 89.

4. C111-153 where the full text of the agreement is preserved.

A day before his trip to Benares, he wrote to his sister on May, 1793: « I intend to depart hence tomorrow with your son Mark to go to Benares. » Indeed they, Lyon and his nephew Mark left Calcutta for the purpose of going to the district or province of Benares and arrived in Cozimbazar on May 12, 1793. They took their residence within the precincts of the factory of the English East India Company at Cozimbazar, in the province of Bengal, in the house of Thomas Brown, the commercial resident of « the United Company of Merchants from London Trading to the East Indies »[1].

This journey happened to be Lyon Prager's last and final journey — while in Cozimbazar he felt sick and died there suddenly on May 13th, 1793.

It was perhaps providential that Mark Prager jr. had accompanied his uncle on this last journey, who was thus in a position to describe the circumstances of his sudden death. According to Mark Prager's description,

« Lyon Prager did not appear to be in ill health, but was only tired and in a rather feverish condition due to the heat of the weather and the fatigue of his trip. Yet, during the night his condition took a turn for the worse and Mr. Brown, the commercial resident, summoned a doctor, Dr. Royt, a friend of his, who ordered his feet to be bathed in warm water, and desired him to go to bed and take a dose of salts, which he did. He had a restless night without any sleep, and in the morning, which was Sunday, appeared a little delirious with a continuance of his fever but not so as to make anyone apprehend any danger, but to our great surprise, was taken in a convulsion, which lasted at least two or three hours in which he breathed his last. He had not been dead a quarter of an hour, but his body was so spotted as to leave no doubt in the minds of the physicians, Doctors Royt and Wilson, that mortification in his insides (brain) must have taken place some time before, owing to the heat of the season, and that nothing could have saved his life. I could not get a word of sense out of him all morning nor did he seem to know what he was about. »

The burial was performed by a Mr. Barber in the presence of Mr. Brown and some other English merchants of the place who (according to Mark Prager) were all much shocked, having been present at his death. « Their attention and civility to me claimed my warmest thanks which I shall

1. Mr. Thomas Brown was a well-known servant of the East India Company in Bengal.

always acknowledge, » stated Mark Prager. He was buried in the Old English Cemetery at Kalkapur, near Cozimbazar[1].

b. *Mark Prager's Correspondence with Calcutta and London*[2].

On the very day of Lyon Prager's death, 13, March, 1793, Mark Prager informed Mr. E. Morris and J. Bebb, the executors of Lyon Prager's Will in Calcutta, of the tragic happenings in Cozimbazar. In most touching words he deplored this untimely death of his uncle, and writes:

« My dear Morris, You will before this reaches you have learned by a letter from Mr. Brown yesterday of the melancholy event which has taken place, this unexpected misfortune will doubtless be very affecting to you and others who have lost a worthy friend but to me the misfortune is still greater. I have lost a second father at a time when his life would have ensured me every happiness possible, and to whom I looked up to for my future welfare. I need not describe to you my feelings on the subject, your own heart, with a knowledge of my situation will suggest everything to you possible. The circumstances of his death were as sudden as they were unexpected... The shock is yet too fresh for me hardly to know what to do, or even to know what I write, which you must excuse, my Dear Morris, I only hope you will continue my friend, as long as my conduct will entitle me to that claim and your advice in everything shall be my future guide. »

He assures Morris that he will stay here

« till I know from you whether I shall return to Calcutta or proceed to Benares... I shall follow your orders in everything, and give such directions to his servants who are not yet arrived as you may wish. I shall write to Scott today and mention this melancholy event to him that he may communicate it to my brother; to them the shock will also be very great. »

Morris replied to Mark Prager on May 15:

« My Dear Prager, I received Mr. Browns' letter late last night and was really too much afflicted to write to you; I have this morning received yours giving me the melancholy account of your poor uncle's and my worthy friend's death... I have lost one of the most valuable and best of friends, to whom I am under the greatest obligations, and the best way I can show my gratitude to his memory will be by doing everything in my power to assist those connected

1. About the text of his epitaph, see above, p. 443, n. 3.

2. The preceeding and the following quotations, if not otherwise indicated are based on letters and documents scattered about in C111-14 in C111-146, C111-148, C111-149, and C111-153.

with him—Accept my most sincere condolence on this sad event and rely on my steady friendship as long as I may live myself. I am really very much depressed in my spirits but shall give you my advice as to your conduct in the best manner I can. »

In this letter, Mark Prager is advised to proceed to Calcutta without loss of time and above all « to seal up your uncle's papers and all his valuables and bring as many of them as you can conveniently with you, leaving the remainder under the care of Mr. Brown. The keys of his chest (iron) you should bring down with you as I imagine his Will to be locked up in it ».

In a subsequent letter from Cozimbazar Mark Prager assures Mr. Morris:

« I shall not open any of his boxes of papers that are sealed till we meet, nor do I know whether his Will is with you, here, or at Benares. I foresee it will be a large concern to wind up, and give us much trouble, however, my assistance to the utmost shall not be wanting... »

In compliance with Mr. Morris' request, Mark Prager came to Calcutta bringing with him all the papers and valuables of Lyon Prager which he could find in Cozimbazar, having taken possession of all the books, promissory notes, checks, keys, writings and documents, and of all other goods, chattels and effects, diamonds, pearls and other valuables and dispatched all this « in the safest and best manner for carriage ».

Mark had the sad duty to inform his brother, Simon[1], who was residing in Mirzapoor and his mother, Hester Salomons, at London, of the tragic events. It was only on June 15, 1793, from Calcutta that Mark wrote to his mother in London as follows:

« Dear Mother, I don't know how to begin to write you by the time you receive this you already know of the unhappy (event) we have experienced in the death of your best friend and protector. What shall I say. It was the will of the Almighty and we must comfort ourselves as well as we can. I lose the most by it. Had he lived a year longer I should have been very happy...

'Tis useless for me to describe to you how beloved and regarded he was by all who knew him, and I am not ashamed to tell you

1. Simon, who stayed at Mirzapoor, wrote on May 22, 1793 to Mark: « My dear Mark, shocked as I am about the melancholy news I cannot help consoling with you on this unhappy occasion. I am with our good friend Scott at Benares but mean to leave this for Mirzapoor tomorrow night. I really do not know how to act until I hear from you. Do you think it proper I should write my mother and what am I to do? Your Affectionate Brother... ».

that all my future prospects will be (brought ?) about by his good name. I have every assurance of help from all his friends and I don't doubt but that the business will be able to continue if it depends on me. But without your support, I shall not be able to undertake anything. I follow Morris' advice in everything and I shall do nothing without consulting him. »

What Lyon Prager meant to his family and to the East India Company has been perfectly expressed by his sister, Mrs. Hester Salomons, in a letter to the Court of Directors in London on November 28, 1793:

« His faithful and able discharge of the duties of his office, his honourable and upright character, the services which he rendered to the Honourable Company by his extensive knowledge of commerce, are fully evinced by the numerous sincere friends which he has left behind him (native as well as European) in India, as well as in Europe, and which if I am correctly informed have also been flatteringly reported by Your Governor General Council to your Honorable Court. In the death of Mr. Lyon Prager, I have lost the protection of a father to my numerous family as well as the society of an affectionate brother. »[1]

### c. *The Last Will of Lyon Prager.*

Mr. Edmund Morris in Calcutta, the attorney of Lyon Prager was, of course, anxious to find out whether Lyon Prager had left a Last Will.

Mark Prager, in his letter of May 13, informing Morris of the death of Lyon Prager, made the first reference to such a Will he found among the papers of Lyon Prager and that Mr. Morris is to be one of his Executors. « Who the others are I am not certain, but I believe Scott and Harrington are — He gave me the keys of his trunks the evening before and said he was too ill to take care of anything. There are many papers and things of value which I shall take care of until I hear from you. »

Among the papers which Mark Prager delivered to Mr. Morris were included: « Two testamentary papers, writings and one testamentary paper in the handwriting of Simon Prager, his brother », who resided at the time of Lyon Prager's death at Mirzapoor.

Mark asserted that he delivered these three papers in the

1. C111-14 ; in C12-653-4 it is repeatedly stated that Lyon Prager « was the principle correspondent in business and on whom Mrs. Hester Salomons had a great dependence »... and « on whom she looked for support in her business ».

same state in which he found them when he took possession of them « without any obliteration, erasure, or expunging and without any addition or alteration whatever ».

These three papers proved to be the Last Will and Testament of Lyon Prager. They contained twenty-seven paragraphs, in which detailed provisions for the disposition of his Estate have been made[1].

He appointed as his Executors in India Mr. John Bebb, Mr. T. H. Harrington, and Mr. Edmund Morris, and in England his sister, Mrs. Hester Salomons, widow of the late Mr. Israel Levin Salomons, Mr. William Willis, banker, and Mr. Benjamin Goldsmid, all residing in London.

Concerning property, merchandise, jewelry and pearls, which were entrusted to his care for sale or deposit, he directed that on producing proofs thereof, they shall be returned to the owners and he ordered also that all his lawful debts shall be paid without unnecessary delay. He requested that all rough, unpolished diamonds and other precious stones and pearls which are his property shall be sent to Europe and be disposed there, either by private or public sale, while all other merchandise of his own property shall be sold in India « unless my Executors here would think that the goods or any part thereof will find a more favorable sale in Europe in which event the goods are to be consigned to my Executors in London ».

He made also dispositions concerning his household furniture and livestock and other property and ordered them to be sold according to the judgment of his Executors either in England or in India at public or private sale.

The last sixteen points of his long Will pertain to the legacies and bequests to his family in London. To his sister, Mr. Hester Salomons, widow of the late Mr. Israel Levin Salomons, he bequeathed the sum of ten thousand pounds sterling of lawful money of Great Britain payable prior to any other legacy to be her own property and at her entire disposal.

He bequeathed, « to each of my brothers and sisters married or single, being the lawful children of my father, the late Jacob Levin Salomons, who died at Amsterdam (since my being in India) the sum of five hundred pounds sterling of lawful money of Great Britain on their having attained the

1. There exists a shortened version of Lyon Prager's Last Will, also unsigned and undated in Bengal Wills, 1794, no. 14, a copy of which is also in the India Office Library.

age of twenty-one years ». It is stated that Mrs Hester Salomons is again to be included under this provision as one of his sisters and therefore entitled to this legacey.

To his uncle, David Levin Salomons, residing at Amsterdam he left the sum of five hundred pounds sterling of lawful money of Great Britain and in case of his death, to be divided among his lawful children, share and share alike.

To the « lawful children of my late uncle, Israel Levin Salomons, who died in London (since my being in India), he bequeathed « the sum of three thousand pounds sterling of lawful money of Great Britain payable on their having attained the age of twenty-one years. N. B. My nephews Lionel Prager at Bombay and Simon Prager residing at present with me and also Mark Prager who is expected soon at Bengal, I direct that their legacies, being children of my said Uncle Israel Levin Salomons may be paid to them either in India or elsewhere at their option ».

The names of « the lawful children of Israel Levin Salomons » are not listed in that paragraph but are added at the bottom of the last page of the Will in the corner of the left hand, written in *pencil*, saying « namely, Lionel, five-hundred pounds, Simon, five-hundred pounds, and Mark, five-hundred pounds ». Apart from legacies to his immediate family he left certain sums for « such charitable institutions in Bengal and London According to the judgment of his Executors there. »

Among his friends whom he listed as beneficiaries were Mr. Thomas Scott « in testimony of his good conduct whilst in my service ». He bequeathed to Jessy, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Israel Levin Salomons, and « the wife of my friend Benjamin Goldsmid », two miniature pictures of her parents, « the one of her father encircled with brilliants and the one of her mother set in a plain case ».

At the end of his Will he requested to pay, « The residue of all my property and effects to my aforesaid sister, Mrs. Hester Salomons, widow, of the late Israel Levin Salomons and in case of her death such residue shall be divided between her children, my brothers and sisters share and share alike. »

From a preliminary rough estimate made of Lyon Prager's assets at the time of his death, it appeared that his Estate, after deduction of his obligations and debts and considering the outstanding moneys still to be collected, amounted to a sum of approximately two-hundred-fourteen thousand sikka rupees, consisting of cash, diamonds, pearls, real-estate and belongings of all kinds — a considerable sum and a reflection on Lyon Prager's successful commercial activities in India.

d. *The Legal Examination of Lyon Prager's Last Will.*

« As a British subject in his lifetime and at the time of his decease [in the service and employ of the United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies], and as an inhabitant of the town of Calcutta at Ft. William in Bengal, leaving diverse goods and chattels, credits and effects within the said provinces, countries and districts of Bengal, Behar and Orissa », Lyon Prager was subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in Ft. William.

His last Will as found among his papers, consisting of three different testamentary dispositions were therefore submitted by his attorneys, Mr. J. Bebb and Mr. E. Morris of Calcutta to the Supreme Court at Ft. William. These papers became the subject of a legal investigation and examination and its legality and reliability were checked and probed. This was the more necessary since the three papers were in an imperfect state: two of them were written wholly in Lyon Prager's handwriting, mostly in ink with some minor parts in pencil, but none of them had any names, subscriptions, signatures, seals or attestations of any persons as witnesses.

Furthermore, one copy was not in the handwriting of the Testator at all, but was written by his nephew, Simon Prager, and some of the crucial figures were written in pencil and not in ink, in particular the words, « three thousand », the sum bequeathed to his nephews and other sums for charitable purposes.

A very detailed record of all the legal proceedings concerning the probing of the Will of Lyon Prager, preserved in the Public Record Office in London under the title « Copies of papers received from India and other transactions relative to the estate of Lyon Prager Esq., who died in Bengal, May 3, 1793, » indicates the major problems involved. The task of the Ccourt was first of all to establish the handwriting of Lyon Prager, and to summon witnesses who were acquainted with Lyon Prager's handwriting, and also to explain why the color and appearance of the writing in ink differed from that of other parts of the Will. Among the first witnesses summoned was Simon Prager, nephew of Lyon Prager. At the time of Lyon Prager's death, the « young Prager », as Simon Prager was called by his friends, was residing at Mirzapoor. Being informed of his Uncle's death by his brother Mark he returned immediately to Calcutta and the Supreme Court interrogated him in connection with Lyon Prager's Will.

Simon Prager declared under oath on June 5, 1793, before E. Morris:

« to the best of my recollection, my worthy uncle in August, 1792, while we were on our way to Calcutta (from Benares) on board « The Pinnace » gave me his Will, made out in his own handwriting, to copy, which I did and compared it with the one written by himself — nor was the deed in my presence either dated or signed. My uncle never disclosed to me his intention, as to what legacies he meant to leave — nor had we ever any conversation together from which anything in this respect could said. The Will I now allude to was the only one I ever saw — I am extremely sorry it is not in my power to be more particular, however, I hope the deed will stand good in law, from its being of his own handwriting. »

Of not lesser importance for the question of the validation and verification of Lyon Prager's Will was the testimony of his other nephew, Mark Prager jr, who had accompanied Lyon Prager on his trip to Cozimbazar and who happened to be present when Lyon Prager died, and who brought the Will together with other belongings, documents, effects, etc., to Calcutta and delivered them to Mr. Morris.

Without going here into all the details of the legal procedures, it may suffice to mention that during this long investigation, lasting over one year and one-half, Mrs. Hester Salomons, the person most concerned with the Estate of her brother, was kept informed by Mr. Morris about all the stages in the litigation. On January 2, 1795 Morris could finally inform Madame Israel Levin Salomons that

« the Will of the Deceased had been established in all its parts by the judgment of the Supreme Court on the evidence of several very independent and disinterested witnesses as to their belief that the hand writing was of the deceased. We had therefore no good grounds to appeal from the decision of the Supreme Court to the King in Council in England and such a measure would have been attended with an unjustifiable expense on our parts. »

Mr. Morris enclosed in this letter

« Probate of the Will granted to us and an official copy of the definite sentence of the Supreme Court which will enable you to take out letters of Administration in England if not Probate. If on inspection of the original Will and the evidence in the cause, the Executors in England should see any cause to be dissatisified with the final decision of the Supreme Court in India, we believe they may have been made from this country by the Executors in India. »

Mr. Morris promised to ascertain the whole property of the deceased Lyon Prager in England, « with as little delay as possible » and assured her that « the Estate is sufficient to discharge the legacies made in his Will in full ».

Morris thought it, however, proper, out of certain legal considerations not to transmit at present

« the whole of the assets of the Estate to England, though we have required the opinion of the advocate General on the subject and if he thinks we can with safety do so, the whole assets will be transmitted to England as soon as possible by Bills on the East India Company, »

He concluded his letter as follows:

« We have lent out part of the Monies on Collateral Security of Companys paper to prevent loss of Interest and have the pleasure to observe that no bad debts appear, but such as were bad long before the death of Mr. Prager and considered as such by him.

« We were very glad to hear you had effected the Insurance on the « Earl of Oxford » for the Diamonds and Pearls... all the Jewelry shipped was as far as we could ascertain the property of the Deceased — though we did not find the articles so very distinctly marked as he mentions in his Will — but every article that we could distinguish has been reserved and will be kept till we receive directions as to their disposal from the several owners. »

## C. FROM LYON PRAGER TO GEORGE PRAGER

### 1. *The Continuation of the House of Prager in India*

Despite the great shock which the untimely death of Lyon Prager meant for the firm and family in London, Mrs. I. L. Salomons was determined to have the activities in Bengal continue and the question of a suitable successor for her late brother, Lyon Prager, occupied immediately her mind.

It is a reflection on the extraordinary personality of this woman that despite her grief and sorrow she did courageously carry on and immediately made plans to fill the breech caused by the death of her brother Lyon.

It was paramount for the survival of the House of Trade to find as soon as possible a suitable successor to her late brother, Lyon, in India, so as not to disrupt the Anglo-Indian trade of her firm.

Mark, who happened to be with his uncle at the time of the death and who, through his partnership in the home firm in London and through his association with Lyon Prager in Bengal had undoubtedly acquired some experience in the diamond and indigo trade to qualify, was indeed most anxious to take over the business of his late uncle. While still in

Cozimbazar preparing the liquidation of his uncle's affairs and the dispatch of his belongings to Calcutta, he expressed in his first letter to Mr. Morris in Calcutta, his hope to be regarded as qualified to become Lyon Prager's successor. In this letter of May 13, 1793, he writes:

« I am much afraid my uncle had so little idea of being so near his end that little or nothing concerning myself will be mentioned in his Will, though he has often hinted to me that he meant to make some alteration the first opportunity. I hope, however, by my own conduct and the assistance of his friends will in some respect enable me to succeed in his steps. »

He urged Morris to write to him:

« if you think I stand any chance to succeed him in his appointment with the Company, I will offer my services gratis, until they are convinced I am able to perform the duty required. I have been brought up to business from a child, and no work shall I consider to difficult to establish myself in the eyes of the world as a copy of my uncle. I shall love to hear from you... »

In his reply, Morris told him he could not give him any assurance at this point as to his chances to be Lyon Prager's successor but counseled him that

« Lyon Prager's memory is so much respected by the Gentlemen of the Board of Trade, that I do hope they will do everything they can, and no endeavours of mine shall be wanting... ».

In another letter to Mr. Morris he wrote:

« I hope after this severe blow (and think it is high time) that Fortune will favor me with her smiles and leave off tormenting me as she has of late. I should image if the Company do give me the appointment with the sanction of Lord Cornwallis and the Board of Trade, the Court of Directors will not make any alteration; and I hope we shall be able to muster up a little interet at home to prevent anything of the kind... »

It is somehow astonishing that Mrs. Hester Salomons, who knew her oldest son Mark better than anyone else, his weak character and unbalanced personality, and all the troubles he caused her in London, that she should have supported Mark Prager's ambition and regarded him as qualified to be her late brother's successor. In any case, she made serious attempts to help him obtain his goal. In a « Petition to the Court of Directors of the United Company of Merchants

of England trading to the East Indies » in September, 1793, she solicited the Company's protection for her young son Mark, who had already gone to Calcutta in 1792, and asked them to grant him the « appointments which you so kindly bestowed on my late brother ». She stressed that Mark's « abilities and knowledge of trade are indisputably great, from an uncommon early period he has been accustomed to the trade of all kinds of drugs and particularly indigo, which he studied in Holland as well as under his late father in England, and since that time in large dealings in my House of Trade »[1].

She added:

« I dare pronounce that if the benevolence of Your Honourable Court is extended towards my family in this instance that it will in some measure be repaid by him by a double portion of assiduity to the duties of the appointments as well as to the interests of the Honourable Company at large : I need not add that my gratitude for such a favor will ever live with me. The great influx of diamonds and other precious stones into this country from the Continent lately, has greatly depressed that trade, but should it again revive, I beg leave to add that my son is in every respect qualified to succeed his late Uncle, Mr. Lyon Prager, from a perfect knowledge of that branch of trade, obtained also in Holland, as well as practiced for many years in this country... »

In further support of her application, she referred to her late brother's activities and many of the services he rendered to the company and expressed her sentiments as follows:

« In the death of Mr. Lyon Prager, I have lost the protection of a father to my numerous family as well as the society of an affectionate brother. These losses I seek to restore in the person of my eldest son Mark, whom I took into partnership upon the death of my late husband, Israel Levin Salomons. »

Mrs. Hester Salomons did however, not omit to mention some of Mark Prager's shortcomings:

« This young man from having too early the management to a large capital and from too great a fondness for the pleasures which the Metropolis holds out to giddy youth and formed a connection which he with the advice of his friends went abroad early in the year 1792, to break off. He is now at Calcutta whither he went to consult with Mr. Lyon Prager what place to settle in. »

1. C111-14, petition of November 28, 1793.

She mentions also that she had received favorable reports from India about him, that having seen his errors he had attended closely to business.

### 2. *George Prager — Successor of Lyon Prager*

The reaction of the Board of Directors in London or the Board of Trade in Fort William toward the proposed candidacy of Mark Prager as successor of Lyon Prager was, however, negative.

Instead, George Prager, the brother of Mrs. Hester Salomons and the brother of the late Lyon Prager was chosen to be the successor of Lyon Prager in India. It seems that when the candidacy of Mark Prager was not met with enthusiasm by the authorities of the East India Companies in London she had submitted the name of her brother George. In her petition of November, 1793, to the Committee she prayed that

« Mr. George Prager may be appointed to succeed the late Mr. Lyon Prager as Inspector of Indigo and Drugs at Bengal and be allowed to go to Bengal to adjust the concerns of her deceased brother. »[1]

The Court of Directors was favorably inclined toward this request, but could not make a definite appointment, because

« having no information of the arrangements made by the Governor-General in Council in Fort William on the death of Mr. Lyon Prager, they can only recommend to the Court to permit Mr. George Prager to proceed to remain in Bengal for the purposes stated by Mrs. Salomons on his entering into the usual covenants with the Company... ».

According to an official communication of February 19, 1794, Mr. George Prager was permitted « to proceed to Bengal to adjust the concerns of his brother, deceased »[2].

Mrs. Salomons expressed her sincerest thanks to the Court of Directors for their support given her petition in favor of her brother George, and at the same time, she informed Mr. E. Morris in Calcutta on May 30, 1794:

« my brother, Mr. George Prager, has gotten the Company's permission to proceed to Bengal and I hope to obtain for him the succession to

1. Committee of Correspondence, December 4, 1793 and January 9, 1794.
2. Press List of Ancient Documents, Imperial Record Room, vol. 15, 1795-1797, p. 46. See also Bengal Abstract Letters, vol. 2, fol. 384, February 19, 1794.

Dr. Fleming who now holds the appointment of my late brother Lyon... his knowledge of indigo and drugs will be found competent and useful... »[1].

Mrs. Hester Salomons had meanwhile learned « by late arrivals from Bengal » that a certain Dr. John Fleming, a great friend of the Governor-General Cornwallis who had lived for 21 years in Bengal in the Company's service and had functioned as the Head Surgeon of the Presidency, had been appointed Inspector of Indigo for the Company on the same footing as Lyon Prager. Mrs. Salomons, not deterred from pursuing her plan, continued to press the candidacy of George Prager to succeed Mr. Fleming, especially since it was learned that Dr. Fleming intended « very soon to return to Europe ». She submitted another petition to the Court:

« May I be indulged...to entreat that the Honourable Court will be pleased to direct that Mr. George Prager may be appointed Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs for the Honourable Company, should it again be judged advantageous to their interest to make purchase of these articles. »[1]

*Agreement between George Prager and Mrs. Hester Salomons.*

In expectation of George Prager's eventual assignment as Inspector and Purchaser of Drugs for the Hon. Company and as Mrs. Hester Salomons' agent for the trade in India, she concluded with George Prager an agreement in which are stipulated all the details as to the sharing of the profits which eventually would accrue from the expected trade in these commodities such as

« diamonds, pearls, corals, precious stones, goods, wares, and merchandises of every sort and kind whatsoever, which shall be the property of him the said George Prager and by him consigned to Europe and shall at the several and respective times of such consignment or consignments also furnish unto the said Hester Salomons an account in writing of the actual and original prime costs of the same respectively and not otherwise in order and to the intent and purpose that the said Hester Salomons and such partner or partners as aforesaid shall and may dispose of the same respective consignment as his agent in the best and usual manner. »

Mrs. Hester Salomons, that experienced and remarkable business-woman, submitted a memorandum to her brother

1. C111-148.

George prior to his departure in which she puts down what could be regarded as a code of business methods and ethics and personal behavior, based on the experience which Lyon Prager had with European merchants working in Bengal:

*Instructions for George Prager from His Sister, Mrs. Hester Salomons*[1].

1. You should make up all the bulses of diamonds yourself, sealed with your seal, and marked GP no. 1 progressively, the bill of lading also to be marked and sealed to correspond.

2. One invoice and bill lading to be in the bulse, and duplicate by another ship, triplicates by a third ship, as long as the war lasts.

3. If you send goods or diamonds home by the first ship of the season and no opportunity offers by foreign ships to write us to make insurance, you must do it there. In all orders for insurance be explicit and cautious as to the name of the ship on which you send the goods, if you send them on different ships and should not be certain of their names, by reason of the uncertainty when you can ship them, say « make insurance of ship or ships of the East India Company warranted to sail between such a date and such a date ».

4. If you have anything of great moment to write to Europe address us two letters, by the same ship, one of them under cover to Willis Wood and Co., our Bankers in Lombardy.

5. When you ship diamonds the bills which you draw on us against them must express payable 6/months after the delivery of the diamond by such a ship, naming the ship, the bulses, with its mark and number. Of these kinds of bills you have copy as well as others all for your Government, also copy of a power and bill sale for goods in captains and officers privilege.

6. If you enter into any agreement insert always a penalty for the performance adequate to the loss you would sustain by a failure of the contract.

7. Be sure that all the goods and diamonds you ship, that the same be registered in the Company Manifest, otherwise they will be confiscated.

8. Mention always the crops of Indigo and Sugar and the quality of Drugs in your Market.

9. If you take an assistant to whom you wish to give a share of your commission or profits be careful not so sign papers, that may involve you as a partner with him. The laws in this respect are very nice, and you cannot exercise too much caution. No bills, demands, letters or agreements, will be complied with by us that

1. CIII-14.

are not signed by you, and if you take an assistant get some respectable House to answer for his honesty and sobriety.

10. Any material news, send us with all possible dispatch whether by sea or overland, particularly with respect to peace or war, with the native powers in India such as Tippos, or the Marattas.

11. The present prices of drugs are precarious, be careful what you buy.

12. Do not draw without sending full amount to cover your drafts, if you draw on goods the bills must be made according to the form which you have expressing payable so many days after our receiving the produce of the said goods at the India House, and not so many days after the prompt, for it often happens that the cash is not received, many days after the prompt, because the brokers do not pay in for their lots; by the Prompt is meant a certain fixed period made by the Compamy for the payment of all goods bought at their sale which is generally about 3/m. after they are sold.

13. If you can remit us L 8/m. or 10/m. India Bills on the Company, X and can draw on us not shorter then 6/m. at the same time, and that we have either an advance or the use of the money for 6/m. do so, as we can discount the India bills and need not pay your drafts before 6/m. sight. If the Company bills which you remit are not optional bills, they are better and more easily discounted. By optional bills is meant certain bills, drawn by the Company in liquidation of their India debt, and are drawn 548 days after date (which is one year and a half) with a power reserved by the Court of Directors here to postpone payment of the Bill as long as they pay Interest half yearly at 5 per cent on the amount.

14. Be careful whom you recommend without you know them and if you are obliged to give a Letter of introduction, write us privately the character of the parties. Be certain of the solidity of a House, before you recommend them, that no outside then induce you hastily to form a good opinion.

15. Do not force business. It will be of little or no consequence if you are there sometime without doing any mercantile transaction.

16. Exert yourself to procure for us all the orders you can for effecting insurances. Your friends shall be served free of commission.

17. Be particular and write us to the point by every conveyance whether overland, by Foreign ships or our own ships. —

18. Economy in dress and living is particularly recommended to you, the mode in which Lyon Prager lived was the best. Solid merchants are particularly averse to all appearances of expense and the credit will always attach to you in the one case when a total loss of it will be the event of the other. Punctuality and a strict observance of promise will add quality to your weight in the line in which you are to move. In this particular Lyon Prager was eminently conspicous...

19. Be cautious of what acquaintances you form on board the ship and keep good friends with the Captain and other of consequence on board, don't be too communicative of your situation and views at

Calcutta, this may lead others to oppose you and can do no good. The ladies who are always of great weight in India may do you service, don't be too warm with them so as to excite jealousy nor so cold as to excite disgust, for this will in a great measure stamp your character after arrival.

20. Captain Kempt will order your trunks off into the gun room in safety, say nothing of it as long as you are persuaded of their safety, keep nothing of value in your cabin. Robberies prevail in a ship almost as frequently as on shore.

### 3. *The Activities of George Prager in Calcutta*

George Prager's first and foremost task after his arrival in Calcutta on February 13, 1795 was to attend to the still unsettled matters of the estate of his late brother, Lyon, and to continue the diamond trade. He informed his sister and his brother Meyer that he went through all the books of his deceased brother Lyon and that he also received from a former servant of his, corals belonging to Lyon, two pearls which were assigned by Lyon to his sister Hester, as well as a watch belonging to Lyon Prager in the possession of Mr. King, which he bought back[1].

He recovered also part of the diamonds and pearls belonging to his late brother, which he was allowed to ship to London because

« I came out with leave of settling my late brother's business and being in possession of several parcels to large amounts, I think I am entitled to and send them home. They consulted and I was allowed to send them. »[2]

He refers also to the house of his deceased brother Lyon which

« remained empty and nobody will take it, being a house so much exposed to the sun. I have had it cleaned and put a little in order and live in it till we can get one that will take it for me. I find my brother had taken it at his option to keep it for four years longer. It is paid for till the 1 February 1797, and I thought as it has such a good name I should do right to occupy it. Morris even advised me to it — As I tell you he is really a good friend of ours... »[3].

In attending to this matter, he realized how popular and how important Lyon was in the merchant-colony of Calcutta

1. C111-151.
2. *Ibid.*
3. C111-148,-C111-149, and C111-151.

and how greatly the loss was still felt by all concerned. He observed also: « I think our brother Lyon would have made a great fortune if he had had a partner ».

In another letter he expressed to his « sister and brothers » again his sentiments:

« My dear sister and brothers, my sentiments you know, I shall try to go the honest and plain way to work which our worthy brother deceased did pursue and if possible imitate him who went so young and so soon from this world and is so much regretted throughout Calcutta. You may imagine that such are the works of the Almighty and we mortals must not murmur thereat. »[1]

The commercial activities of George Prager in Calcutta and Benares from the very day of his arrival are recorded and described not only in the official Bengal records of the Company but in much greater detail in the voluminous and bulky correspondence with his sister, Mrs. Hester Salomons, as preserved in the family archives in the Public Record Office[2].

From his detailed reports to his sister from March 1, 1795, we realize that he built up for himself a very profitable trade and shipped to his sister regularly diamonds, precious stones, drugs, indigo and corals, and other commodities, adhering strictly to the conditions of his contract with his sister Hester.

In connection with his commercial activities he had to visit Benares many times and got permission from the authorities to reside there if he deemed it necessary [May 14, 1795]. He disliked Benares very much and wrote to his sister on June 4, 1796, « What a disagreable place in India for Europeans and what we Europeans have to suffer...it is a place I would never wish to see again, many great merchants are ruined there [Benares] ».

In any case, he was very proud of having so much success in his commercial activities and wrote in July, 1795:

« I am surprised that I am come to such fortune. The name which I have, thank God, is very good. I have a great deal honor shown to me by everyone. I hope to God He only leaves me health, then I shall live here to be of great profit to you... They have such a good opinion of me that they believe all I say, I shall go to work with truth and honesty which my good friends shall ever be my guide... ».

1. C111-151.
2. C111-148.

His letters contain many interesting details about the persons with whom he associated himself and who helped him in many ways, above all Mr. Morris, the attorney in Calcutta, Lyon Prager's Executor, who continued the friendship toward the Prager family.

About him, he expressed the following views:

« I think Morris as far as I can judge, a worthy man though at the same time very interested and till now he appears to be a friend of mine. I sometimes in trifles let him get some profit, in this I see makes the friendship stronger. My dear sister and brother thank him for the politeness which till now he has shown me. He has been married about one year with Mrs. Stark, a widow, she had a great deal of money, and as I hear, Morris has settled all upon her, which shows he is a worthy man and must also have money. Bebb is a worthy man and is every day with him and was a particular good friend of our late good brother. »

Mr. Fleming was another acquaintance who continued to hold the appointment as Appraiser and Purchaser of Drugs as successor to Lyon Prager. George Prager expressed all through the years the hope that he would eventually be entrusted with this appointment as soon as Fleming would leave for Europe.

Repeteadly, he announced to his sister, « Sir Fleming is about to leave for Europe », only to retract this statement in the next letter since Fleming had again stated that he had changed his mind and decided to stay in Calcutta.

He was sure that Fleming, who was « a doctor and cannot be capable of handling the drugs and indigo like a merchant » would soon be replaced. This « soon » did, however, never occur as far as George Prager was concerned. Nevertheless, George Prager engaged himself in private indigo trade with much success.

A close business associate of George Prager was a certain Mr. Rothman, who had many important connections and functioned as a private secretary to Sir John Shore[1]. Through him, George Prager had an easy access to the leading English merchants of Calcutta, to serious personalities as well as to fortune hunters and doubtful figures who made up the circles of English settlers in Bengal at that time, and planned even to establish a formal partnership with Mr. Rothman.

1. He became later Governor-General of Bengal.

### 4. *The End of the House of Salomons and Prager*

In the middle of his prosperous career as a Free Merchant in Bengal, George Prager's activities came to a sudden end due to his untimely death in the year 1798. The exact date and the circumstances of his death and the place of his burial are not yet ascertainable.

The death of George Prager would not have meant the end and dissolution of the firm of Israel Levin Salomons' Widow, had not occurred in the same year the death of Mrs. Hester Salomons, who passed away in London on April 18, 1798.

The great responsibility she had to carry as the director and head of a large international business concern, the tragedies which befell her — firstly, by the death of her husband in 1788, by the death of her son Simon and her brother Lyon in 1793, and now by the death of her other brother George in 1798, coupled with those many disappointments caused by the misbehavior of some of her sons and her brother Meyer, and by the steady tensions, jealousies and conflicts within the House of Trade were apparently too much, even for so strong and remarkable woman as Hester Salomons.

She left a Last Will, dated April 29, 1795, to which a further cod; cil of January 28, 1798 was added. Her Will, comprising over thirteen long folios, written in English and lawfully probated, on August 10, 1798, before the Surrogate Court at London, is a very detailed and complicated human and financial document[1].

Her remarkable personality, her professional abilities and human qualities are profoundly reflected and mirrored in her disposition of her worldly possessions, in the legacies made to all her surviving children, including Lionel, the blacksheep of the family, and Mark Junior, and to her associates and friends.

As executors of her will she had appointed her son-in-law, Benjamin Goldsmid, his brother Abraham Goldsmid, and William Willis, who together with her son, Mark, were made the administrators of all of her belongings. The large amount of bequests made indicated that the House of Trade, despite earlier difficulties, was financially sound and strong.

1. See Somerset House, 1798, Walpole 563. The very detailed provisions made by her to her children, associates and friends need no further discussion here.

The liquidation of the firm with all the legal repercussions does not fall within the scope of our study.

With her passing, that remarkable chapter in the Anglo-Jewish association with Bengal, which was initiated by her late husband, Israel Levin Salomons and so successfully performed by her brother Lyon Prager and continued by her other brother George Prager, came thus to a conclusion.

## D. THE JEWISH BACKGROUND OF THE PRAGERS

Beyond the mere fact that the families of Salomons and Prager belonged to the Jewish community of London, known as « Hambro »[1], their support of synagogues and charitable Jewish institutions could undoubtedly be confirmed, if and when the communal records of that period will be examined by Anglo-Jewish historians.

An insight into the Jewish consciousness of Israel Levin Salomons shows that he, the founder of the House of Trade, was deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and observation, and interested in the Jewish education of his children. His Last Will allows us to sense this background of an eighteenth century Jewish merchant of London.

The opening statement of his Last Will, written in Hebrew on 22 Shebbot 5544 [1784] and signed with his Hebrew name, Yechiel Prager, reads[2]:

« In the name of the God of Israel — whenever it pleases God to call on me, I do hereby order and desire that my body shall be kept twixe twenty-four hours after the departure of my soul before it is interred and that workmen shall be ready at the burial ground to cover my grave with bricks and that proper watches shall be kept for a fortnight, examine daily that nothing is removed, that prayers shall be read during seven days twice a day with a congregation of ten persons, that ten learned men shall pray thirty days for the good of my soul for which three guineas shall be paid to each of them. »

1. About the beginnings of the « Hambro Synagogue » of the Ashkenazic Jews in London, see the most illuminating study by R. J. d'Arcy Hart, « The Family of Mordecai Hamburger », in *Miscellanies of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, vol. 3, London 1937, pp. 57-75; and the well-known works by the Anglo-Jewish historians such as Picciotto, A. Hyamson, Cecil Roth; see the references in the Magna Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica, A Bibliographical Guide to Anglo-Jewish History, new ed. by Cecil Roth, London 1937, and Nova Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica, ed. Ruth P. Lehmann, London 1961.

2. Somerset House, MX. 1788, Calvert 99.

Israel Levin Salomons' widow, Hester, hailing from the same pious Ashkenazic Jewish background voices similar feelings in her Last Will, written in 1798[1]:

« In the name of Jehovah, the Almighty God, in whom I trust, Amen. I Hester Salomons of Devonshire Square in the city of London, widow being at this time of sound and disposing mind, memory and understanding do make publish and declare this present writing to be and contain my Last Will and Testament and in the first place I resign my soul into the hands of Almighty God the creator of all trusting to his mercy and I desire my body may not be interred until three days after my decease and that then it may be plainly and devoutly laid in the grave close to that of my late husband Israel Levin Salomons. I have already purchased the same for that purpose my said grave to be first prepared in the same way and every ceremony observed relative to my burial which was done in respect to my said late husband and I desire that proper persons be appointed to guard and protect my grave for the space of one month next after my interment when I desire my tombstone to be set and the prayers and payment to be made to those employees in such manner as were made for my said late husband. »

She made in her Will special provisions for Jewish charities and bequeathed a small amount to

« the trustees of the Synagogue to which I belong, in London, called or known as the Hamburgh Synagogue situated in Churchrow Street, London, to be paid by them and divided into amongst the poor of the said Synagogue in such manner as the said rulers or trustees shall think it fit. »

Her daughter, Jessie, was married to the well-known Jewish banker, Benjamin Goldsmid. It is reported that the mansion of Benjamin Goldsmid contained besides a collection of works of art and a big library of manuscripts, also a private synagogue, and that to the Chief Rabbi of London was appropriated a piece of land of his, the produce of which — fine wheat for the Passover matzoth—was annually presented to him[2].

1 Somerset House, 1798, Walpole 563. I have not yet been able to ascertain the inscription on Mrs. Hester Salomons' tombstone in London.

2. About Benjamin Goldsmid and his life and activities, see above.

See Paul Emden, *Jews of Britain, l. c.*, p. 90, who remarks that, « not withstanding such marked domestic religiosity, Mrs. Jessie Goldsmid, four years after her husband's death, deserted together with her [seven] children the Jewish faith and was baptised at St. Vedast's at Forest Lane ». She remarried a James Henry Dacon and died in 1836.

It is indicative of the Jewish education[1] her sons have received when Simon Prager wrote her on November 1, 1790 from Bengal:

« you have mentioned something about my religion, which I took very much to heart; you know, dear mother, I was brought up by you always to follow the Jewish religion. »

Lyon Prager, as well as his brother George Prager belonged to the same religious climate, and both continued to be faithful Jews, even though they may have removed themselves, while in India from any rigid observance. Lyon Prager's Jewish consciousness manifested itself in a variety of ways, even while so removed from the mainstream of Jewish life and from any organized Jewish communal activities.

His Last Will, contains a very significant provision as to his funeral:

« If my death should happen in India my body be decently interred and that the service be performed in the usual form, excepting that I request whoever shall read the prayers will recommend my soul to the *mercy of the only God, without mentioning the son or the Holy Ghost* — and if my death should happen in England I direct that I may be interred in the like manner as was ordered by the late Uncle

1. Mr. Israel Levin Salomons had engaged a private tutor for his children, a certain Mr. Friedland, whom Lyon Prager characterized as a man who « possesses a great many good qualities and has for many years done his duty as much as possible to show your children the right way, it is not his fault that he did not succeed in it, in particular with Mark, whom he did not educate, and Mark's example was enough to spoil the other boys. I beg that you will write him a few lines from me and say that I have the best opinion of him, that I expect he will Harry show the right way, and give him from me £ 25, for which I credit your account. I should have written him myself but I have not time. »

Lyon Prager expressed various views about education and in one of his letters of July 26, 1792 from Benares he writes : « I would never advise a friend of mine to educate the children under the father's roof, this is the reason why your children know so little and have been so badly educated; this is my opinion, and I confirm it because I have found it as well among Jews as Christians, though they have the best and most capable masters. »

« When you will make your observations that the greatest men, and the most sensible both Jews and Christian have ever been educated in Public — I wish you would give this my opinion to Ben and Jess that their Children may not like yours give their parents so much sorrow and trouble. With girls it is quite different, they cannot be too much under the Eye of a good mother. I thought it necessary to explain myself, first that it may be of service to your Children's Children and other friends. »

Israel Levin Salomons in every respect — I also direct immediately after interment that my grave be properly secured and that a tomb stone be rected on which is to be engraved (if in India) my name in English, Persian and Hindoo languages[1] with such epitaph as my executors may think proper. »

Lyon Prager did not fail to make special provisions for Jewish charitable and religious institutions and bequeathed sums

« towards the support of such Synagogues and charitable purposes in London as my sister, the Widow Hester Salomons may judge proper », as well as « towards the support of such Synagogues and charitable purposes in Amsterdam as my sister, the Widow Hester Salomons may judge proper. »[2]

The intense Jewish consciousness and strong sentimental attachment to their Jewish heritage, is, above all, manifested in the fact that they continued frequently to employ, as vehicle for their correspondence — in essence of a commercial nature — with their sister and relatives, in London, both Hebrew and Yiddish. Hebrew and Yiddish letters from Benares to London, from the Ganges to the Thames! Even when they wrote in English — and the bulk of their correspondence was of course in English — their letters abounded in Hebrew terms and allusions to Jewish holidays and customs[3]. Both Lyon and George Prager were apparently much attached to the Hebrew language, as testified by frequent references in their correspondence such as, « I shall write you in Hebrew », or « I think it best to answer all in Hebrew », or « you will now have received all the Hebrew letters I have addressed to you... ».

When Lyon Prager heard of the marriage of his niece Harriet he referred to her as a « gebensht girl ». He expresses his congratulations to his niece Jessy with a phrase, « hoping that with Jacob, Aaron and Israel they may live to see honor and everything good ».

Reference is made by Lyon Prager to the story of Joshua, « who had the power to stop the motion of the sun and the

1. It is rather strange that Lyon Prager did not mention a Hebrew inscription for his tomb.

The provision he made in regard to the Persian and Hindustani languages was not carried out, probably because those who put up the stone were not acquainted with this Last Will.

2. They are items nos. 20 and 21 in his Last Will as found in his papers.

3. These references are culled from letters mainly in the bundle C111-151, but see also C111-149.

moon » and to other Biblical events, all indicating his Jewish background. He asserts also as an assurance, « it is as true as the Law of Moses ». In another instance he expresses his feeling, « I fear the poor Jews will suffer much », probably in connection with the French-Dutch war. When Lyon Prager heard of his uncle's death in Amsterdam, he remarked in a letter to his sister, « He left a good name among Jews and Christians — we must submit to the will of providence ».

George Prager, too, seemed to have been particularly eager to use Hebrew in his correspondence with his sister, as well as with his brother Meyer in London. On one occasion he asked his sister, « I beg you will write me a couple of words in Hebrew. It will give me great pleasure and satisfaction. God give you but health, Amen ». He was elated when his sister's letter in Hebrew arrived, « just a day before Kippur ».

On September 25, 1795, George Prager writes from Benares to his sister that he is closing his business because

« I am preparing myself for tomorrow, being the Day of Atonement (Kippur). Hope to pray... I shall keep this day as a religious man and as sacred that God Almighty may send you all health and no more misfortunes. and troubles. »

In another context he states « I will ever keep the day of Kippur. It is our duty to do so ».

After having visited the grave of his nephew, Simon Prager [d. 1793], George asked his sister, « If you could send me a short sentence in Hebrew adopted to his character, I will have it engraved on his tombstone ». At another occasion he writes to his sister, « I have been at Simon's grave and before leaving this place shall add an epitaph also with a few words in Hebrew »[1].

Despite all this it is evident that neither Lyon nor George Prager or their nephews, who came to Bengal, had any affiliation with an organized Jewish community for the simple reason that there did not yet exist any at that time anywhere in Bengal[2].

The question of the existence of a synagogue in Bengal had become a topic of discussion in the deliberations of the High Court in Calcutta, when Lyon Prager's Will was examined and the reference to « synagogue or synagogues in London or Amsterdam or elsewhere in Europe », was inter-

1. C111-151 of September 5, 1795, fols. 35, 41 and 42.

2. About Lyon Prager's two Jewish acquaintances in Benares, Benjamin d'Aguilar and Pellegrino Treves, see my forthcoming study on these two Jewish personnalities and contemporaries of Lyon Prager.

preted. The High Court came to the conclusion that « there are not and is not any synagogue or synagogues in Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa ». The Court, however, enlarged this statement by adding, « or any other part of India », which indicated how little the Court of Calcutta was acquainted with the actual Jewish settlements in India, since there existed at that time synagogues in Cochin, in Bombay, as well as in Surat[1].

A Jewish community in Calcutta came only into existence at the beginning of the nineteenth century and developed into a well-organized community when a wave of migration brought to Calcutta, Cochin Jews, and Arabic-speaking Jews from Basra, Baghdad, Aleppo, and from Yemen. The rise and development of this Jewish community from its beginning in the nineteenth century, with its magnificent synagogues and its prosperous and creative Jewish spiritual life, until its present stage of deterioration and decline will be outlined in a different context.

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1. See my *The Jews in India: Their contribution to the economic and political life*, publ. under the auspices of the I. Ben Zvi Institute, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1960. See the Review in *REJ*, I (XXI), 1962, pp. 225-228.